UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

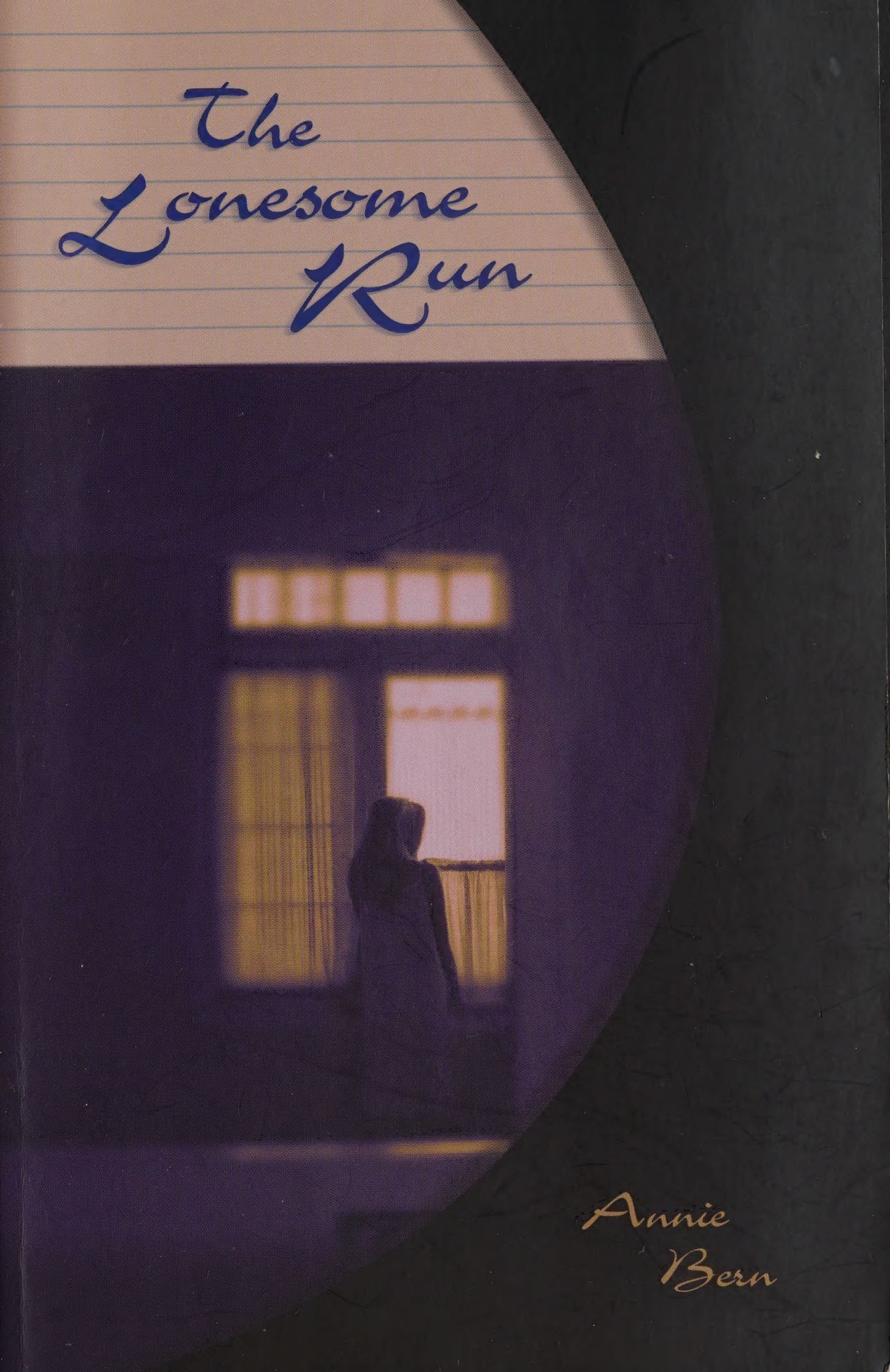
ועידת התביעות
Claims Conference
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

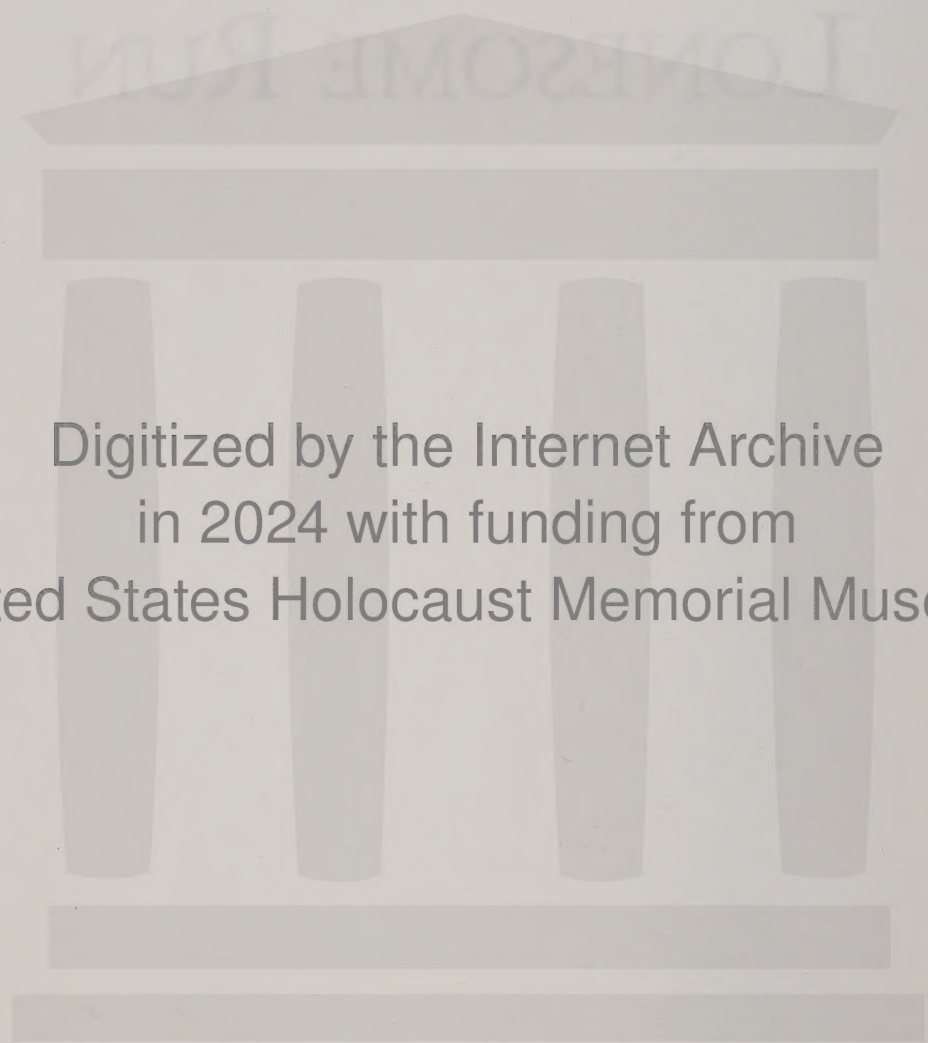
The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-479-9717 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.

The Lonesome Run



Annie Bern

The Lonesome Run



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024 with funding from
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

https://archive.org/details/bib293564

The Lonesome Run

Annie Bern

Rutledge Books, Inc.

Danbury, CT

Copyright © 1999 by Annie Bern

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
Rutledge Books, Inc.
107 Mill Plain Road, Danbury, CT 06811
1-800-278-8533
www.rutledgebooks.com

Manufactured in the United States of America

Cataloging in Publication Data
Bern, Annie
The lonesome run

ISBN: 1-58244-006-9

1. World War, 1939-1945 -- Jewish resistance -- Biography
2. Jews -- Hungary -- History -- 20th Century.
3. Wallenberg, Raoul. 4. Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)
Czech Republic.

813.54

PROLOGUE

Survivors' Meeting, June 1981

SO, FINALLY CAME JUNE 10, 1981, and we boarded El-Al for the World Gathering of the Holocaust Survivors. I still keep wondering: Why this gathering? It brings back so many painful memories, and I always hesitated to go to Israel for this meeting. But since I cannot go to Auschwitz to visit my parents' graves, my sisters' and brothers' graves, I decided to go. Go to Yad Va'shem for a memorial—that was my purpose. And also the hope against hope that maybe, maybe I would find somebody, which I really deep down didn't believe.

This search of all the peoples, their painful eyes, was something to understand. Only one of us can understand. The deep lines, the wear and tear of the hardship during the war, surely showed up on everybody's faces. And everybody was wondering why the gathering, and why do we all really go. But again, we cannot go—nor do we want to go—to Auschwitz. Poland is soaked with Jewish blood. I personally could never visit that place. So we make it a habit to go to Israel and say Kaddish for our parents, sisters and brothers.

There were a lot of questions as we boarded the plane. Each of us had a million questions to the other—"Where

were you during the war? How did you make out? How many children do you have?" And the never-ending questions didn't even let us sleep one second on the plane.

And the memories, the painful memories constantly haunt us—haunt me. Even the pleasures that some people have to say about their present family didn't heal the past wounds. They can never heal. We're living, but part of us does not live. At least not me. Part of me is in Auschwitz or in Bergen-Belsen.

Soon we are about to land in Tel Aviv and start this meeting, which was to begin at Yad Va'shem with many, many speeches. There were speeches of memories, speeches of the present, speeches concerning the fear that anti-Semitism is spreading again all over the world. And of course fear of the future, which is a constant Jewish—how should I say it?—a constant Jewish fear; a constant monkey on our backs. What will happen—anywhere in the world will anti-Semitism touch you.

Finally the people of the world came to realize that it's not the other Jew that is suffering—when one is suffering, we all suffer. We talked about Argentina—the anti-Semitism there; we talked about our friends; we talked about many, many things. But mainly the memories went back to my parents, my sisters and my brothers. How could a world be so quiet for so long? Whey didn't they bomb Auschwitz? Whey didn't they bomb Mathausen? Why didn't they bomb Bergen-Belsen, where my sister was kicked to death?

There were a lot of children, mostly Israelis. There were a lot of teenagers, and their eyes were a billion questions. They would have loved to stop us all and talk to us. Especially, the

evening of June 15th, when the gathering started in Yad Va'shem. Next to me was sitting a very young man. I didn't know that he was a soldier who was just on leave and had put on his civilian clothes. His parents came to Israel, living through Maidanek and Auschwitz, and he told me that shortly after he was born, the second of two children, his parents died. And he questioned everybody in sight because he didn't have a chance to hear it from his own parents.

He was talking, and talking, and talking, and asking endless questions about what happened and why. Why did we come for this gathering? And if something happens again, what would we do?

Well, he understood that only Israel is a country that can do something to protect the Jewish people all over. Israel needs the support of all of us. She cannot stand alone among so many enemies.

Then there was the search for pictures. The constant search-"Who do you know?" A million people stopped and asked me, "Are you from here or here? You look familiar. Your face is familiar." It wasn't hard to search out our faces-they're lined, they're full of worry and full of sad memories. We definitely look different from others. No people my age have so many lines I do.

The meeting and the plea ended, June 15th was hopefully uniting all the youth and forming them. Many of the young people throughout the world, even in Israel, don't even know, didn't get enough education about the Holocaust or what happened or how it happened. My question is: Why for so many years was it hidden? Nobody could talk about it. Everybody avoided it. Some of us put it down on paper, just

sort of talking to ourselves. Putting it down on paper. Then after thirty years the subject became a part of history. And what bothers me is that some people sit down around a round table and just talk about a Holocaust like it was just another...planned part of history. Of course it doesn't hurt them like it hurts us. We're still alive. We're still alive, yet some people would like to tell us it never happened—it's Zionist propaganda. Sure, if it never happened where are my parents? I would like to seem them. I would even like to see their graves-if not in Auschwitz somewhere else. Or the graves of my sisters and brothers.

So while I'm still alive some people try to erase that part of history, to call it a lie. Who knows how many of these lies they put in history before?

June 16th, there were a lot of activities and a lot of things to do that were all interesting. We chose to go to the youth conference in the Survivors' Village where there were young people, under 35, from all over the world. I was glad that choice was made because the first speaker was a young French man around 30. I would say a Jewish young man from France. And he was the most outspoken, the most clearly understood gentleman.

He said that as far as he's concerned the Jewish people were killed three times. He was speaking about his grandparents who were killed—murdered in Auschwitz. He was speaking about his parents who were painfully, constantly, talking about it. They were fearful of instigating hate into their children. They also died at a young age because of various heart troubles caused by the concentration camps.

He said that the second time that the Jews were killed

was because some people deny that these things ever happened, and it was made up as Zionist propaganda. And he says that the Jews should be alert. What bugs him most, what bothers him most, is that intelligent, sophisticated people sit around the table and dissect the Jew like they would a frog. They talk constantly without any feelings about the Holocaust, what happened and why. They talk like real academicians—on paper it would be a frog. Of course, he says, it's not frogs, it's his own flesh and blood. And the fear, that if the world goes into an unemployment situation, the Jews would be blamed everywhere and it might break out again. And again we all pinpointed the strength of Israel. Yes, that's our protection, the only protection that we can trust.

There were other speakers who were not so sophisticated and were not so specially clear about their intention. One girl, who was a professor of psychology, wanted to sell a book, and she was a real academic—talking in circle language.

The last speaker was the director, a young man of 35, from Yad Va'shem. And what he said reminds me of my whole life-apologetic Jew. Why the heck do the Jews have always to apologize? Why do they always have to have the answers? He said if a German fraulein worked as a volunteer in Yad Va'Shem, this would probably be her best job, her best place of work because what she saw she would probably like-there is no question. And she demanded from him an answer about the Palestinians, he wouldn't have the answer. How stupid can he be that he thinks he has to answer her? And why couldn't he answer her with the questions I always ask: "Sure, you feel sorry for the Palestinians? You're right. Absolutely. Why don't you settle them in the houses that you

robbed from the Jews, that you killed them for? They will blend well with your people. Sure, you should settle them. How about all the wealth you grabbed from all of the Jews all over the world? You should be paying the Palestinians—definitely."

How about asking somebody the question: How many Jews were thrown out of the Arab countries? Nobody seems to ask that question. And where did they settle? Sure, they settled in Israel. So why cannot all the Arab countries settle all these Palestinians? I don't even believe there's so many of them. Besides, there is a Palestinian state, which other people tend to forget-or just dismiss. Jordan, that's the Palestinian state. And how many times did they jump Israel? So for all the Jews-we should stop answering questions. The world owes us an answer. Where were they during World War II? Where was the United States? Why didn't they bomb Auschwitz, Mathausen, Bergen-Belsen, Teresenstadt, and all? Oh sure, yes, they bombed civilian populations. They didn't hesitate to bomb the center of Budapest-many times. Of course for me it was a heaven. I found food in the bombed-out houses, and also slept overnight on a mattress here and there. But who's going to give an excuse for that?

So there are two things that I would like to say to the Jews. Stop answering questions—you don't have answer. Let the world answer a few questions.

So, the same afternoon, after this meeting with the young people, we went to the kibbutz. We went to the kibbutz Tel Yitzchak. It was chosen for us because they had to assign a certain amount of people to each kibbutz. I would have preferred Yad Mordechai. Since I had pictures from the Warsaw

Ghetto that were found in a Philadelphia basement I wanted to hand them over. But it wasn't up to me, so I went to Tel Yitzchak, which is a beautiful kibbutz started by the people fifty years ago. And they started with nothing. When they started to build the kibbutz there was malaria, there were all kinds of sicknesses. Many of them died just building the kibbutz, and they used to live in huts covered with wet sheets so their children could sleep.

What's most interesting is that this is a most cultured kibbutz. They grow their own food, they manufacture batteries, and lately, of all places, they have seminars where they teach about the Holocaust. Yes, and people* come from come from the whole world, even from Germany, to learn about the Holocaust. So my question is: Why in the world is it hidden? Why did nobody talk about it for so many years? Suddenly, when most of us are getting to a really old age, and people are dying out every day-those that were left-suddenly we became precious to tell the story. To retell it. Not to forget it. To contradict those that keep saying it never happened-it's Zionist propaganda. We better say it and say it fast.. Say it loud and clear and put a few questions to the world. And not to think that we have to have the answers for everybody. Especially not to apologize. Nobody should ever dare to apologize for my parents' deaths, that it was just a certain time.

So this gentlemen at Tel Yitzchak—near Natanya, which is about forty kilometers from Tel Aviv—is teaching the history of the Holocaust. Where are all the universities? Where are all the schools that don't have it in their books? Does ten years of murdering Jews have to disappear, to just be erased in history? These are questions I would like to ask of some

people, some who say there is too much talk about it. How can we talk too much about it if it's a ten-year history during which six million Jewish people disappeared from the face of the earth?

Wednesday June 17th, was the day we visited Masada, which was quite a moving experience since way back our ancestors died rather than fall into Roman hands. They were lucky—they lived in that part, at that time, and they were able to choose their place of death. My parents were not. But to see Masada, a natural fortress—it's just amazing. Just unbelievable. To see Ein Gedi, which a group of young Israelis built up, where vegetables and fruits are growing in the sand. It's just another miracle. Or maybe just the plain Jewish genius: to grow food on a land where it was wilderness for ages. That land was also bought with money.

Going up Masada you have to have goose pimples; I did. I just realized the history of my forefathers, the history of the Jewish people, the amazing buildings of Masada, the amazing height. It's just a natural miracle and no other way.

There is also a little bit of Niagara Falls coming down from the big mountain of Masada. A tiny trickle of water constantly drips. I wonder where it comes from. And it's sweet water, badly needed.

The history made me connect with my own parents, when they had nowhere to go. Nowhere; all the doors were closed. They were just glad to get it over with. How much, how much can you suffer when you have no outside help, you have nowhere to go—when all doors are closed?

After Masada, we went to the kibbutz at Ein Gedi-where I just mentioned that everything blooms, everything grows. It is

a beautiful, beautiful kibbutz just built up in the last few years.

Not far from there is the Dead Sea. Well, they used to call it that-but no more. It should be really "The Future," and from the richness of the sea they make all kinds of useful things, including cosmetics.

Some people touched the water of the Dead Sea, for the cure. I was just standing because I was half-frozen with wonder. I didn't know what to think or what to say at that time.

On the way home we again and again saw where a few years back, there used to be stones, a few rocks, where now there are grapes growing, tomatoes, olives, vegetables. Unbelievable, how fertile the land of Israel is. Every little piece produces enough to feed so many people. And it's worked by Jewish hands.

We went back to the hotel in Jerusalem to get ready for June 18th, which was the closing of our meeting. June 18th was a Thursday during which we went to look at the old city of Jerusalem, the ancient city of Jerusalem, where they destroyed synagogues, destroyed temples. That was the way Jordan left it: everything broken, everything beaten up. Yet hopefully there will be a new life built on the same place.

We walked on Har Zion, in the hundreds. So many reporters stopped us, so many reporters photographed us. I had no patience and wasn't willing to talk to any of them. I just walked by. It was the walk of memory, it was the walk of memory to all our parents, sisters, brothers—to all the Jewish people who had nobody left. Like my aunts, my two aunts. Their whole families were killed. I was thinking about them, too.

Walking down we got candles. Each of us got a candle to light for our families. How could I light one candle for

thirty-five people? How could I? Nevertheless, we lit the candles and we went to the Wailing Wall—even though they don't call it that anymore. It's the Western Wall, because the wall does not cry, the wall is there to remember. To remind us of our strength-that we should never lose hope. This is exactly what I felt.

As we were sitting near the Western Wall, and waiting for Menachem Begin and other officials to arrive, we saw many brides going to the Western Wall before the chuppah, for the wedding ceremony. Some when went with their future husbands, some with their fathers. But they all went. It was an amazing sight as they kissed the Western Wall to pray for their future.

The place was so crowded that in the history of Israel there were never so many people gathered at one time—standing, sitting everywhere. There were maybe about twelve thousand people: soldiers, bearded religious Jewish people, and many, many young Israelis. They were so curious as to why we came, and maybe they were searching for answers-that either they didn't have the parents to give them, or their parents didn't know. This is an amazing thing, that our children and grandchildren still don't realize what happened. How long do they have to wait for the history?

The speeches were moving. They were in six languages: Hebrew, English, Yiddish, French, Spanish, Russian. And it was handed over to the younger generation, the future generation, to carry on the memory of the six million Jews, some of whom were my parents, my sisters and my brothers. And it was all very moving, all very moving-all five days had been, but this was the most moving of all. In silence we

walked back at almost midnight to our buses. And in silence—while the buses were so loud—everybody went home, their minds in Auschwitz, Mathausen, Bergen-Belsen, Teresenstadt, Treblinka, and all over.

Friday, we had made the request to spend the day—or the half of a day because they close around one o'clock—at Yad Va'shem. We had to go say good-bye to the death pictures, to the memories. So we went and we spent the day. And as I was talking to many people, I mentioned that I cannot understand: How could they plan a trip to Poland? Is it all business? How can anybody walk on Polish soil soaked with blood? It was in Poland that all the concentration camps managed to be built by the local help. It was in Poland that the vicious Auschwitz was built. And Poland was the only country after the war that killed Jews. The Poles were shooting at them and killing them from wherever they came. They didn't permit them to stay. And it was Poland who turned against their own Jewish students in 1968 when there was the revolution. And when the microphones yelled, "Zionist _____, Zionist _____," they turned against their own fellow students and said, "You're a Jew." This was told to me by a young man who came here in 1970. His mother is not Jewish, but his father is, and they lived in Poland. But when he marched with the students, suddenly his best friends turned against him. He understood what his father went through, and he said he's leaving—he cannot stay in a bloody country.

So I was glad that they had to cancel the trip to Poland, the extension trip to Poland, because there weren't enough people, and some people outrightly condemned it. Who can

walk on Polish soil with so much blood? And after the war in 1968—and even today—there are no Jews, but they would like to blame the Jews. It would be nice if they could dig them up—they have many big cemeteries—and just blame them for their own unrest today. That's Poland for you. And that's the Polish people and they never change. The Polish and the Ukrainians-they were just as vicious as the Germans, sometimes even more. Not to apologize for the Germans, but they had good henchmen, they had excellent, excellent help. And then they turned against them and killed them too. First they used them as helpers, and then they killed them.

Friday June 19th, we went to Yad Va'shem at our own request. Because we just couldn't leave that place without touching each and every picture from the Warsaw Ghetto, from Treblinka, from Maidanek-from everywhere. It's a big difference when we walk through that place from when the average tourist walks through. We touched every stone, like we would say good-bye to our own families. We stood there in silence. Our driver couldn't get us away. The people who were closing up begged and pleaded with us to leave. We left in terrible silence, some with swollen eyes, others with heavy hearts.

Realizing what we went through in that place, the driver took us to the old city of Jerusalem. Yes, we were cheered up there. Again we went to the Wailing Wall, as it is the custom for the religious Jews to go there, before the Sabbath. We went to Mount Zion, where there are a lot of memorial plaques from all the cities, almost all the cities. Then we were shown the rebuilding of the Temple in the old city of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the part of the Jewish Quarter. And he really tried to do everything to cheer us up a little bit.

But the Sabbath set in and we had to leave. We had to go back to the hotel and settle quietly for a rest—so it is a good thing in a way, that the Sabbath came.

That evening we went to a new synagogue around the corner on King Street. They had opened a new synagogue in memory of the six million Jews. There were six large candles lighted. Many rabbis were there and they rehearsed the Kaddish. It was a touching moment. Again and again in my mind I was back, back in Jasina. Back in Jasina from where they took my parents; back in Budapest where so many Jews died on the streets, where the Danube was floating with bodies-mainly children.

So after the services we went back to the hotel, and it was a real peaceful, relaxing evening. The next day we had to stay in the hotel because the buses don't run on Saturdays-which was good, too. We were provided with newspapers and we read the news of the world and just relaxed for that one day—mentally and physically. Of course all restaurants are closed, and we couldn't buy any food—which was no loss since everybody was trying to lose weight.

My God, every time I read in the news that why—why didn't the Jews protect themselves, why didn't they fight back?—I have to pinch myself to see if I'm alive or if I'm somewhere in Auschwitz, dead. Now they tell me that these things didn't happen. So it's not enough that they killed so many innocent Jewish people. They tried to erase us, they tried to kill us three times at one time. Why does the world ask, why we didn't fight back and defend ourselves? How the heck do they know how many people died defending themselves or fighting back? Do they know of the dead? Do

they know that Budapest then was full of people-kicking and screaming? I would like them to see the heroism, the heroism and how they defended themselves—the hostages in Tehran, Iran—against the mobs. Nobody talks about these people defending themselves; they always try and find something on the Jew, something. Either he's a Communist or he's a Zionist, or else why didn't he defend himself during the war? Or these things never happened. When the hell is this going to end? Never, never. Especially what bugs me, what I cannot understand, is when some Jews ask me: "Why didn't you defend yourself?" Or "How come you lived through that?" Well, I'll tell you how come I lived through that, because I just didn't want to die from the Nazis. But it wasn't my skill-it was just one of those things. I didn't choose to live, just like my parents and sisters and brothers didn't choose to die.

And I have seen many people fighting back-but to no sue. If you don't have outside help—only outside hostilities—and everybody wants to see you dead, so they can have your shoes, or they can have your hat, or they can have your land in my parents' situation—there is not much hope. But one thing I can tell everybody: there was plenty of fighting back. And to live through this mess, to live through it is a...victory, anyway. And it only happened with the Jewish hope against hope. Yes, it was hope against hope. Only with fantasies, only with imagination did some of us live through it. It may be just a miracle, because I do believe in miracles. So it's really unbelievable that just in my lifetime it should be denied—the Holocaust situation should be denied—and that they should question us: Why didn't we fight back? How the hell can people fight back without ammunition? And how the hell does

the world know that we didn't fight back? Of course we fought back, otherwise the few of us there are wouldn't be here. Some of us kicked them, some of us spit at them...some of us were thrown in the _____, or thrown in the Ukrainian bloody fields. Who knows what these people went through? Who knows what my two brothers went through when they were shot? What kind of heroes does the world want from a weak people—a hungry, weak people? What can hungry, weak people with enemies all around them do with no help?

Yes, there was plenty of fighting back, and as one of those fighting back, it was my will that: They will not get me alive...

Chapter One

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SUNNY DAY with blue skies in the peaceful surroundings of the big mountains. Not even a leaf stirred; the frogs and birds dared not make a sound. It was the first day that the Czechoslovakian government started to train all citizens to use gas masks, to keep all lights shut out with dark shades, and to recognize enemy spies.

It was difficult to imagine who could be a spy in this group of people sitting on the grass in a circle and waiting for an instructor from the army barracks to come train the villagers. There were mostly women, children under seventeen, and older people who had not forgotten or still had unhealed scars from the First World War. Young people between the ages of seventeen and forty-five were all in the army. The Czechoslovakian army was a proud, healthy army—well trained, well equipped, and very self-confident.

Little did we know then that all the training, preparation and loyalty to our President Benesh, and the best democracy in Europe, would soon be sold out by Mr. Chamberlain to the swallowing lion Hitler and his greedy followers. No one could have believed that the Czechoslovakian army and their hopeful people would be left without leaders, as President

Benesh, his ministers, and some generals resorted to their last available plan: to leave the country rather than face the torture and execution of the bloodthirsty Germans. The sad news spread like a black cloud in a wild, stormy wind.

The soldiers handed over their ammunition and uniforms to their officers. No one asked any questions, but it was a great disappointment and very hard to understand why our allies sold us out so fast.

Of course, not everyone felt the same way, since Czechoslovakia had many nationalities. The Hungarian people felt great joy because their motherland, Hungary, would swallow part of Czechoslovakia. The Ukrainian and Polish people cheered "Heil Hitler." They all had one thing in common, however, even though they hated each other's nationalities. Their Fuhrer was generous and promised that everybody would have a bite of another country, since the Germans could not swallow so much in one time. Yes, they did share Czechoslovakia with Poland and Hungary.

The generosity of the Fuhrer was announced in our school by our saddened teacher, who asked if someone would have a little time to help him pack up—since he had to leave in twenty-four hours for his hometown in Prague, where the Nazis had already spread themselves. Few students volunteered to help; others screamed and jeered, "Czechs out, " and "Heil! Heil!"

It was a dark, cloudy day when we walked our teacher and his family to the station to board a freight train which would take them home to Bohemia. The local Hungarians gave the Czechs twenty-four hours to leave and deprived them of one-half of their possessions.

Since the Hungarian army and police were on their way from the south to the north to occupy the northern part of Czechoslovakia, they would not let the Czechoslovakian officials ride straight through the Carpathian Mountains and Slovakia, which would be just about twelve hours travel. Instead, the Czechs were forced to go through Poland in unheated freight trains, even with small children. The last time we heard from our teacher he wrote a little about his trip: how he lost his little daughter because of the severe cold, and how some Polish officials who on the train to take away their last possessions-and also took many lives.

We in Jasina were very sad and confused by the fast happenings since the Czech government left. For two days we saw Ukrainians march, demanding their autonomy. The Ukrainians from the Polish side came over the border and joined up with their Carpathian brethren. They demanded that Hitler stop the Hungarians and give them part of the Polish side and the whole Carpathian Mountain range.

The Ukrainians' autonomy lasted only two days until the Hungarian army and police occupied the northern part of Czechoslovakia. We were watching silently, observing how very poorly this army was dressed and equipped, and how in their march one could see that they were not prepared for occupying this part of Czechoslovakia. When the Hungarians took over the city hall, police station, and many other government buildings, as well as private family homes, it was interesting to see their surprise at how well these places were kept up with the latest furnishings and modern appliances. In no time they started emptying the stores, taking four pair of shoes for the price of one; all because they

freed the people from the Czechs. According to the Hungarians, they were heroes. They conquered the world, and it was very obvious that they would grab everything from everybody.

Events reached my home very shortly after the occupation, when the Hungarian police came to our farm to demand butter and eggs. They took everything in sight. When my mother told them that the eggs were only halfway hatched, they warned her that she could not stop them because soon everything would belong to them anyway.

These policemen were a frightening experience for all of us, with their black homburg-type hats with big black feathers sticking out, big strong boots and their bayonets and guns always ready. Their faces were square and frozen, their eyes deep and primitive. One could never compare these creatures to the intelligent, human, and freedom-loving Czechoslovakian police we used to look forward to seeing, who would never come into the house without an invitation from my parents.

The very first week of the occupation I had a taste of the Hungarians' brutality, when they asked me something and I just stared because I did not understand Hungarian. They slapped me and told me, according to my friend's translation that they would not eat our bread. Still feeling the democracy I grew up in, I answered them, "You really eat our bread and not we yours," and added a very funny facial expression to make sure they got the message.

Just a few months later I found out the Hungarian police and army were the mysterious killers who had been murdering people. It was they who used to approach the

Ukrainians and torture them by cutting their bellies open, or slicing their ears off, or digging out their eyes. Of course, the Ukrainians did the same thing to the Polish and the Hungarians between the time the Czechs left and the Hungarian army took over. The Ukrainians wanted part of Polish Ukraine and part of the Czech Carpathians with the autonomy the Fuhrer promised them. But later, after the Ukrainians helped the Fuhrer to rob and murder the Czechs, he (the Fuhrer) ignored the Ukrainians completely. Many messages came from the Fuhrer to be patient and he would still use them against the common enemy—the Jews. He claimed that it was really the Jews' fault that he had to give part of Czechoslovakia to Poland and not to the Ukrainians.

The love between the Poles and the Hungarians continued for a while. They used to meet on the border and talk with their hands, play tennis together, and even go to each other's parties. Many times men would even kiss each other's wives. Their friendship was great, even with the language differences. They had one thing in common: their Fuhrer was generous to them. He shared Czechoslovakia with Poland and Hungary.

It seemed that people didn't think much about the game that went on: big fish eats little fish. But this happiness would not last too long; just until Hitler sharpened his teeth for another bite.

So the friendship briefly continued between the Poles and the Hungarians. They met on the border, which was the most beautiful land in the world, especially in the summer with its large pine trees, endless blooming apple trees, and

the well-built highway which the Czechs had constructed. Along the highway on one side were flowers and blooming trees; on the other side were many fruit trees which belonged to everyone who used the highway. Anyone could eat any amount of fruit he wished and rest on the benches between the trees. What a peaceful feeling I used to get walking through the mountains, breathing the fresh air, and listening to the beautiful and rare birds that one could only see in these Carpathian Mountains. But this was impossible to enjoy anymore since the Hungarians, with the help of the Germans, started to build barricades, and no one was permitted in that territory under penalty of death.

New laws would come out every day restricting the Jewish people from many things. Their businesses were confiscated, and the children could not attend the public schools anymore-only the private schools taught by Jewish teachers, or else stay home. The private Jewish school was started by the local people, so as not to neglect the children. The teachers were housewives, businessmen, or just workers, and everybody took turns teaching the children what they could and keeping them occupied, so they would not have to watch their frightened parents all day.

The local police with their black hats and black feathers became very powerful and the complete rulers in the little town of Jasina. The people who could not speak Hungarian were in double trouble since the Hungarians resented these people who could speak many other languages except Hungarian. The Czechs were considered natural enemies and guarded very closely because—according to the Hungarians' narrow-minded, misinformed skulls—all

Czechoslovakians were Communists, and that is why (they believed) the Fuhrer had to do what he did.

These black-feathered police used to run into many homes day and night and turn everything upside down, because according to them there was a Communist hiding under every bed. What they were really looking for was money, jewelry, sweaters, shirts, or anything they could take. If there was nothing to take, the people in the house were beaten-even pregnant women and children. If there was flour or sugar in the house, that was spilled in the field or dumped out and stepped on with their dirty boots, thereby depriving a family of their monthly food. The amount of food tickets Jewish people used to receive was about forty percent less than the others. Also, the Jewish people were not permitted to work on their own fields or plant any vegetables on the land that was theirs from ten generations back.

It was very difficult for me as a teenage girl to understand how these barbarians could come from a faraway country and dictate to the local people who had lived there for generations. But this was just the beginning. And a very slight taste of what was to come in the next few years with the war and the terrible brutality from almost everybody. War was a chaos in itself, but greedy, bloodthirsty people wait for it like an occasion to profit from, and they know how to turn their coats fast. War is a horrible thing, especially for a young girl who would soon find herself in a strange country, without the knowledge of the language or the people.

Since we did not receive any newspapers in our village and our radios were taken away from us, we knew very little

about the short war that was going on between Poland and Nazi Germany.

Early one foggy morning we were awakened by an unusual noise and commotion outside the house. It sounded so strange. When I looked out the windows I saw the fields covered with soldiers, not Hungarians, but whole armies of Polish soldiers. And they were all over the houses, helping themselves to everything in sight. They slept on the floors, tables, chairs, and even under the beds.

The war between Poland and Germany ended quickly because of an agreement the Hungarians made to let the Poles through the country (Czechoslovakia), mostly on the understanding that the men in the Polish army would leave for England. We did not know who would occupy the part of Poland near the Hungarian border until ten days later, when a Polish lieutenant and his German wife came to my girlfriend Olga's house where they lived for a couple of weeks. They told my friend that the Russians got part of Poland, especially that part where most Ukrainians lived. That was the only reason the lieutenant and his family left Poland. They stayed behind when the Polish army left, in the hope that the Nazis would occupy the Southern Carpathians-their part of the country.

My friend tipped me off fast that they were at her house. She came in once—breathlessly—and begged me never to come to her house until their uninvited guests left. "It is terrible," she said, "the plans these people have and the stories they keep telling us."

It did not take long before I learned how serious the situation was. I saw my friend Olga walking with these people

right past me, and Olga did not even look, or say hello to me with whom she had grown up since childhood. It was very strange for me not to talk to Olga as I used to do for so many years.

But soon I was occupied with my own problems. I realized that being a Jew in this war-or maybe in any war-is a hard burden to carry, especially for a young girl.

It was only one year since the occupation when Czech officials had been forced to leave, but to me it seemed like a thousand and one nightmares. The school for the Jewish students was closed, except for little get-togethers twice a week-which the parents organized for the purpose of learning a little, or just plain talking to keep the children from boredom and despair. I used to look forward to these meetings as they were the only source of information we had in those dark days. No one knew that this was just the beginning of the miseries and tragedies to come. Most of the time at the meetings we were served refreshments like cookies and tea or some apples.

Once the school did not open at the usual time. As all the students waited in front of our house, sitting in the green grass, we began to discuss many of the daily happenings. Sam, the son of the local grave digger, had plenty of news to occupy our time. His father Shmuel was dragged from his home every night by the black-feathered police, the Hungarian Gendarmes, to dig graves—and they warned him that if someone should find out, he would dig his own grave last.

Many times Shmuel tried to look in the graves to see if some of these poor victims were Jewish. Once he had a chance to pull down a dead man's pants to check and see if

the man was circumcised, which was the only way he could learn the corpse's identity.

The black-feathered police would smash Shmuel's head with their bayonets. One day my father Joseph became very sick from similar wounds, and he was not able to go with the police the next time they called on him. I feared this terribly because I heard what the police told my mother when the black heads (Gendarmes) dragged my poor father back: "You better make sure that your dirty Jew is ready for us next time or you will dig his grave and your son's too."

The students sat frozen stiff at the news we heard from Sam, a handsome dark-eyed young man of only fifteen—who looked much older since his life had been very difficult, even in good times. He had to work in the lumberyard every day after school to help support his family. Jasina was a small community, and there weren't too many graves to dig; maybe two or three a month, which did not bring in enough for Shmuel to support his family.

Suddenly a shriek came from somewhere to hide the children quickly. No one knew who alerted the children to flee, but the training we had received from the Czech schoolteachers sure came in handy. In a few seconds no one was in sight. Everyone was breathing very heavily, and the other students all tried to look through the rosebushes to see whose voice was telling us to hide.

I did not have to guess. I recognized my friend's voice, sure that it was Olga. But how did Olga know about this place so far away from her house? Olga's frightened tone of voice signaled me as to the gravity of the situation. For a while, maybe just ten minutes, it was very quiet and we

looked at each other with frightened eyes, no one saying a word. Suddenly there was a noise of someone being shoved. "You better let us know when your husband gets home or we will tear your Jewish son into a million pieces." That was the voice of Vasily, the Polish lieutenant who, according to Olga, came to settle with her mother and stepfather. Vasily screamed at my mother and pushed her from the back while she was holding my baby brother clutched to her chest.

It wasn't hard to recognize Vasily's voice because it sounded very deep and full of brutality. Next to Vasily walked Olga's stepfather, holding a whip in his hand and mumbling something to himself. His face had that blank stare, his eyes very red like he usually looked when he was drunk.

While the Polish lieutenant Vasily pushed Bertha (a neighbor) into the house, Olga's stepfather, in his drunken stupor, suddenly fell on the steps and passed out. Vasily was not too surprised when he returned from the house to find his friend (Olga's stepfather) on the ground. He started to kick his host and shouted, "Get up you Ukrainian pig! You coward—what are you afraid of, a little Jewish blood?" Vasily finally picked up Olga's stepfather and dragged him away on his shoulders.

My friends and I ran back to the house, where the fear and the sadness were great. My mother was crying. That night our whole family went to bed hungry since Vasily, the Polish Nazi, and his German wife had stolen all the food.

And for the first of many time, I vowed, "...they will not get me alive."

Chapter Two

IT WAS THE FALL of 1940, and for a while there was a little calm, and we were able to help a few Jewish men and women who had run away from Germany via Czechoslovakia and from almost all over; some of them didn't even want to say from where they came. They were scared, they were hungry, they were dirty; we tried to help them a little bit with water, some food. That wasn't enough for them. They were anxious to go across the border to Russia. We had connections with one man who lived on the border, and for money he would take them through. This man was Ladino, he was well paid, and most of the time he succeeded in taking them through the border.

It went on for about two months, during which time we might have smuggled through about fifty Jewish men and women—no children. It was very hard to take children through the border because it was guarded and it was mined, and you really had to know which way to go.

What happened after they passed the border nobody knew. It was still occupied—that part of Poland—by the Soviet Union. After a while my two brothers decided to go too because their names were too well-known, and they

feared that they might be taken to the work camp—which they probably would have, since they were in the Czechoslovakian army anyway. So the only solution was running away.

My brother Abraham was 19, and my brother Zev was 24. And watching my mother that night when my brother Abraham left, her pale face, her shaking hands—I have never seen anything like it. The sad eyes, the blinking sad eyes said it all. In her eyes I could read what she thought—that she would never see her son, again. But being a very optimistic person, she always hoped, and she felt, and she told us so, that my two brothers would live through the war, but she was not sure if she would ever see them again.

By November, when the snow started to come in Jasina-it usually would come earlier, like October, and the calm would set in when everybody is home and they bake potatoes and cook hot tea and tell stories—ours was a sad, sad household. We didn't have potatoes to bake because everything had been taken away by the Hungarian Nazis. We did have some tea, which my mother would dry up herself. She would dry apple peels, and it was a delicious smelling tea—it was even sweet. But all we needed was hot tea.

Much information we didn't have. For a while the refugees from the south stopped coming-maybe because of the snow, or maybe because of some other problems. Then in November, since my brother's name was so well-known, a group came. The group consisted of many women, young women, many men-maybe altogether fifteen. And they pleaded with us, especially me—because I didn't want my parents to know, it would hurt them. The Hungarian Nazis would

arrest them, and then they would know what we were doing-we were smuggling people across the border to the Soviet Union. So they pleaded with us that they had to leave. One was a medical technician, and she pleaded with us that because of her profession she had been thrown out of her job; she had to leave. Others pleaded with us, if we didn't help them across, they would be arrested and sent to the work camps.

Of course I went and got Vasily, and I offered him a certain amount of money, and the people paid. He was already fed up with the war, maybe he had enough money. So he smuggled these people through the border. But in his disposition and in his unwillingness to do it, he probably didn't smuggle them to the proper place—because the next morning, as I was cooking a little bit of oatmeal for my younger sisters and brothers, I saw the Gendarmes—the black-feathered Gendarmes also acted as a kind of border police. They were dragging and chasing this group of people, all fifteen of them. To describe the way I felt is impossible. Every nerve, every muscle in my body was dead. My heart was beating a thousand miles a minute, and I started to sweat and perspire. I didn't want my mother to know. It was just me, and I organized...I sort of negotiated their transfer to the border. Nobody else knew about it. My sister, she wouldn't have permitted it. She was too smart and too protective of our parents-she always tried not to hurt them. So I did it. I did it. I felt sorry for the people, I put myself in their place, and I also hoped to cross the border myself soon. So my heart beat something terrible.

And it didn't take long. When they went down to the central office in the small town of Jasina—about five kilometers

from my house (we lived not too far from the border)—we saw the Gendarmes coming fast.

Just at that time I told my mother what happened and again I saw her pale face and that look in her eyes. She didn't say anything at first, then she chided: "You incorrigible...incorrigible rebel. When are you going to stop with your tricks? It's about time you should mature, and you should understand the world as it is, not the world as you would like to have it in fantasies." That's all she said. She was the kind of person who wouldn't say much. But then the fear, the panic was in her eyes. Maybe not for herself-she had small children.

So since I was the big guilty person, I took older my sister and we went up in the mountains to hide. From the hiding place we saw how the Gendarmes my parents, two of my younger brothers and my little sister—the four-year-old baby. And that upset me very much. I couldn't...I didn't know what to do. As much as I hoped we would be able to cross the border with my whole family, they just didn't give us time—we didn't have the time to do it. My sister urged that we should just run away and cross the border, and I said I couldn't do it because then they would torture my parents. They were innocent, they didn't know completely what happened. And how about my youngest two little brothers and my sister? So she agreed with me that it was the proper thing to hang on for a while, and we did until the evening.

When the evening came and they did release my parents, who hadn't known anything, my sister and I started walking toward the police station—or, they called it, the Border Police. On the way down we saw many policemen.

And while we were going down, I told my sister that she should say—which was true—that she didn't know anything. I was the guilty person. I was the spy, I was supposed to be everything. And this is the way it happened: when we came down they released my mother, they released my twelve-year-old brother, they released my little sister who was four. Then they started to work on me.

They brought a special detective because, after all, I was a big spy. They brought a special detective from Ushorod, which was the capital city of Carpathian then.

So this detective called me out, at like 11:30, almost midnight, and he started to hit me, kick me, punch me in my face. And then he ordered a special rubber stick-a very thick rubber jack hit me over my hands. My hands were swollen for about six weeks; I couldn't open them, I couldn't close them. And the Gendarmes, who used to know me, sometimes passed by-they were just watching and with pleasure. And when this big shot detective walked out, one Gendarme came over to me. He said, "Why don't you faint? Why do you stay like this? FAINT! Pretend that you faint and they might stop it." I told him, "You can go to hell, you can go to hell! Not in your lifetime will I faint for you."

And they just came back and continued. I don't remember exactly for how long, but I didn't tell them anything. I didn't tell them where my older brothers were, I didn't tell them absolutely anything. They could kill me, they could squeeze me—they would know nothing. I didn't have a big secret, but they thought I did because I deprived them of a couple Jews that they could send into a labor camp and later kill.

So for about two evenings that they continued to really

beat me up. And everybody was quiet; they couldn't do anything. And I was glad they didn't do this to my sister. She was actually a weak little girl, although she was two years older. And I was always glad they spared my brother. Why did they keep my brother there? Just for numbers, I guess. He didn't know what was happening, he was working. He was about fourteen at that time.

Sometimes in the evening, our neighbors would bring us back potatoes, which were a delicacy because we didn't have much food. They would bring us back potatoes and cottage cheese, and we would really eat like it was the best food in the world, even tiny crumbs, and just enjoy it. And despite the Gendarmes—again, I repeat the Gendarmes were the feathered police, the Border Police—we would recite the prayers, the Jewish prayers, real loud: before we ate the few crumbs of potatoes, and during, and after. And then we would start singing. I couldn't hold hands with my friends for the singing because my hands were swollen, so they held me.

They (the Gendarmes) were just standing and their eyes almost popped out. They couldn't understand how we could still sing. But we did. It bothered some of them a lot that my brother and sister didn't break down, that I didn't break down. The others said what they had to say. They told them exactly who smuggled them, they told them how much they paid, they told them everything.

So after a few days, after they couldn't squeeze anything out of me in Jasina by beating and torturing, they decided to take us to Ushorod, to a military prison. They tied our hands, and we were riding for about ten hours by train to Ushorod. How I begged one of them to untie my younger brother's

hands. I couldn't stand it, but he wouldn't do it.

Anyway, youth being what it is, or being very tired, we all fell asleep, which was the best sleep in the world. We fell asleep and didn't know what happened. Later, in my miseries, I sort of learned how to hypnotize myself to sleep-because to fall asleep or to fantasize makes misery shorter...you just get lost, so...by the time we woke up there we were in the _____, dragged to the big military prison (of which I really don't remember the name), and the people were watching us. They were bringing in the big, guilty Communists (although I didn't even know what a Communist was).

When we came to the military prison—my hands were still swollen—they had given a hearing to everybody else. Of course I was the big criminal because I was the smuggler, and I admitted it—but they couldn't do anything, or give me a hearing, because of my swollen hands. The swelling of my eyes left me.

So they waited a few days, and when only black and blue marks were left on my hands, I was taken in handcuffs to a general and introduced. It was 1940, I was about fifteen years old, and by that time I was beginning to understand a little bit of this language (Hungarian).

To think of it reminds me just of blood and horror. I was introduced and they said that I was a Communist, that I smuggled military secrets to the Russians, and that's why they had to bring me there.

The general had an ugly square face, but his eyes weren't stupid—the way he measured me. And he started laughing right there and then in front of everyone. He started laughing

and he said, "This you brought here? Is this the Communist spy?" And he looked at these detectives—the one who beat me up and another who came with him. "So this is the way you waste your time? This is the spy?" And suddenly he started to pound on the table and I didn't understand anymore. He pounded and broke everything on the table. And the look of the two frightened detectives told me something-that he was not stupid enough to believe that at fifteen I'm the Communist spy. And what did I say, what did I take? There was nothing to take from Jasina. The stupidity, the Hungarian stupidity—I don't think the Russians needed that.

So they took me back to my cell. The cell was a small, long room. It did have a window, from which we enjoyed the cold, fresh air because it was terribly hot in the prison. We also had a hole, which was supposedly a toilet, where you stood with your feet apart. But it wasn't that bad, because the toilet are was covered with a curtain. So we were about six or seven girls in that one room. My brother was kept separately, and I really missed him, and I worried about him. I really worried about him. Many times when they gave me some food I begged the guard to take it to my brother as he was younger, and a boy. A boy cannot stand the hunger like a girl-at least I didn't think so then, and I don't think so today.

But they wouldn't take it. So when I saw him once when they took us for a hearing, I was glad to see that he looked good and his hands weren't tied so much. And my sister gave constant lectures while we were there. What did I do to my parents—that we should have all packed up when my brothers left, and we should have all gone. I told her that we hoped to do this, but it was not good that we go in one group—

suppose something happened. And then I also told her that my parents very much objected because my father was much older than my mother, and their land—their ancestors had lived on that land for four hundred years. They didn't know that these runaway Jewish young people—from Vienna, from Prague, from Berlin, from Hamburg, from all over—would run telling us the horror stories. But of course I didn't tell my parents because I didn't want them to know that we were smuggling people. We did it at night, we hid them in the hay, we hid them in the woods, we hid them wherever we could. So I begged my sister just to leave me alone, that hopefully we would get home and maybe we could still do something with our parents and all, but I knew it was late and I still worried about my brother very much. And I asked how she felt and she didn't feel too good, she didn't feel too good. She was very smart and she knew—she had foresight.

Then about four or five times they took me to these hearings, but not with the general. This general who made fun of the two detectives, he didn't interview me anymore. Others did, and I also didn't see the two detectives anymore. I don't know what happened. And to my surprise one of the officers (I don't remember the rank) asked me if I was mistreated. I showed him my blue and black hands and he said, "What do you show me there?" So I started speaking to him in Yiddish. I don't remember if I didn't know how to answer in Hungarian, or I didn't want to, I told him, "This is what your barbarians did." And all he did was mark it down.

As we were walking—that was the fifth day of the military prison—as we were walking from the prison and it was me, my sister, and my brother, suddenly I saw my mother in

front of us. I saw the pale beautiful face. But her eyes weren't that sad, and I knew that she had done something so that soon we might get out of this prison. Sure enough, the same day, they took us to the train and put us on the train to Hust. They didn't free us yet; their hearts didn't permit them to free us yet. We went from an army prison to Hust, which was another town prison. As we were traveling in the train with the guards, the guards didn't say anything, they didn't tie up my brother and the other boys anymore, but they were sitting next to us. I heard my mother's voice again, like she was running between trains and she was calling us. She was calling "Shandeleh," which was my sister's name, "Fay," which was my name, and she was calling, "Shlomo, Shlomo," which was my brother's name. I heard it and I yelled out, "Mom, here we are, here we are! We'll see you soon!"

First of all, she thought they would release us that night from the prison, but they didn't. They took us to another prison at Hust. When we came there they separated us, they separated us in a group of three, in a very small cubbyhole.

I was luckily with my sister and another girl. And it was so very cold, it was so terribly cold. I think I got my legs frozen the first time right then and there. My sister had boots, so she was a little bit better off.

They kept us there for two days, without any questions; nobody questioned us. Suddenly they came and they told us we should sign, that we would be released, and they released us.

I don't remember exactly how we got to Jasina. Well, we got to Jasina by train, but who paid for it? Because from then on we were without the guards. I have a feeling that the Jewish community sort of put us on the train, but it's hazy; I

don't remember. And we walked home at night in this big deep snow, and it was really hard. There was also a lot of fear about what would happen if the Gendarmes met us again. So we started to walk faster and faster, thinking we should get home before sunrise, before dawn. And we made it, and when we came home, there was good tea smell. My mother also had a big bread for us, with some butter, which was the best meal I had eaten in a long time. After that she melted some snow and we washed up, and nobody said a word; we were sitting and looking at each other. And of course my younger brother fell asleep, and so did I, and so did my sister.

The next day there were talks that this Vasily, who used to smuggle the people, had run away. He got scared when we were arrested, and he left his family and took off for the Soviet Union.

Well, that must have been like in December. In early spring of '41, the Hungarians and the Germans attacked the Soviet Union from all sides. They started shooting. We heard shooting early in the morning, but no answer; there was no answer. And it didn't take the Nazis long, since the Russians pulled back, to occupy that part of Poland. And we were sort of very sad because if you have a border to run away through, if you have somewhere to run—you run. But if not, if the Nazis will be on this side and on that side...so it was a very sad day for us, even though we didn't know what happened with the people in Russia. We were still hoping to get everything together and run away.

So that was one sad morning. It was just like we felt or predicted the bleak future that the closing of that border to the other side of Poland would have.

Still, it was sure great being home. I really didn't know that it would only be for a short time.

The weather really wasn't too bad...and, luckily there was a little bit of hay left in the stable and we hid. I had no idea exactly why, until I insisted my mother tell me. She had sort of bribed us out of prison, because they were ready to shift us to some concentration camp right then and there. So we hid out in the hay during the daytime, and to keep from going crazy, we started to write each other notes. The notes were very interesting because they usually came in three languages: Czechoslovakian, Russian, and German. Luckily we had enough paper from some old books, so we wrote notes to each other. Of course, the big thing was when we got a hot meal at noon, which was usually potato soup and bread—but did it ever taste good! When a person is hungry surely everything tastes so good, especially hot, homemade soup like my mother's.

Many, many times we were warned in advance. We were hiding in three different corners because the police would come in and search. They didn't have to search for anything in particular; they would just run in and search and stick their bayonets in the piles of hay, so we hid in three corners. Sometimes if things were a little bit more peaceful we, snuggled in. But we did not talk, and so as not to make any noise, we would write notes to each other.

The best time to hide was when there was a big wind or big snowstorm because we knew they were too lazy and wouldn't hunt Jews at that time (by "they" I mean the Hungarian Police, the Gendarmes, the way they called themselves, with the black hats and the big black feathers).

So we used to write notes. My brother, who studied the Bible, would teach us a lot from the Bible. For me, I was curious about my sister's boyfriend, and would ask her all kinds of questions. And I knew how much she was in love, and that she would like to get married. But the tradition being what it was, Shandeleh could not get married because there was an older sister. And that I find stupid—really stupid.

I used to write her a note—mostly in Czechoslovakian—that as soon as we were able to get out of hiding, and if her boyfriend Berl wasn't in the working camp—they should get married right away whether my mother liked it or not. She shouldn't keep two people in love from being married. And if my sister Sophie, who was much older, didn't want to get married, my sister Shandeleh shouldn't be kept back from her own happiness. Of course her eyes used to light up when she read my notes. The reasons for writing notes were two: one was that we could not talk loud enough; and second was that by writing the notes, and reading them, we would be able to kill more time, and things wouldn't be so boring and monotonous while hiding in the hay. I talked to my sister about rebelling against our parents, especially my mother. I told her that she should get married and not wait for our older sister Sophie to find a husband. My little brother cautioned me that it's against the religion, against the Bible, to rebel against parents' wishes.

Another happy thing was the once-a-week hot bath. The "hot" isn't as easy as some people would imagine. For a hot bath, the water has to be carried from the well. It has to be heated, it has to be put in a long wooden bathtub, and then finally you can climb in and have a bath. My sister and I

would have it together. But my brother Solomon couldn't have his bath with our youngest brother Samuel, because my parents didn't tell him or our younger sister that we were hiding; they were scared the children would blabber it out to somebody. So my brother was privileged to take his bath by himself. He used to tease us about it.

There were those nights, those long winter nights, and sometimes it was very cold. Then my mother had an idea that maybe we should move our kitchen stove to the stable and cook there, so we would be warm. But that was a dangerous game, because the Gendarmes would examine exactly why they did it. So on the very, very cold nights—by cold nights I mean below zero and the wind was so strong it cut into a person's body—my parents took the risk and brought us in the house. And that was a risk for them and for everybody. They still had those feather blankets, "down blankets" they call them, and when you climbed into a blanket like that you felt like heaven. So we would sleep. But in the early morning we would be woken up to go into hiding again, because you never knew when the Gendarmes would jump in search. I don't know what they had to search—already they had taken everything that my parents had, and a few good rings that my mother bailed us out with—that she managed to hide and used to bail us out. She paid in Ushorod, I don't know to whom, but she paid so we should be released.

Chapter Three

SO THAT'S THE WAY the winter went, and by the spring, somehow, by the spring—that is, around May of '41—somehow we heard that the police knew we were out of prison. That sure didn't sit well with the leader of the police. He came to my parents and they claimed they didn't know where we were. But it didn't take long before my parents decided we should just come out to surface—whatever will be, will be. Because they couldn't keep it secret anymore, since the Gendarmes and the officials would visit them every day just asking where we were. So as soon as we came out to surface-that means from hiding, from hiding six months in our own stable in the hay—we immediately had to report every week, every Friday, to the Gendarmes to sign up like criminals, like parolees. And that was already, of course, a very complicated issue. They finally released my brother from having to go sign up every Friday because he was twelve and a minor, and he belonged with my parents. And that made me feel a little better.

My sister and I would go constantly, every Friday, to sign up, and sometimes my sister's boyfriend would come with her so the police would just know that there was man in her

life and she was not free—free flesh for anybody like they used to think. In fact, once the chief of police signed us up, and he told me to wait a little, and my sister left with her boyfriend. I told her to leave because it was better if not both of us were there. And he suggested that I should be his girlfriend, that things would be easier on me, easier on my parents. So I said, "How much easier would things be?" He said, well, maybe I wouldn't have to come in, he would sign me up instead, and maybe they wouldn't plan to report me. I said to him, "But this is against the law. How can you have a Jewish girlfriend? How CAN you have a Jewish girlfriend? You are a superior being and the Jews are inferior, according to your theory." He didn't answer at that, but it made him quite nervous. Secondly, I asked him if he was married, and if he had asked permission from his wife, and what did he think would happen if she knew he waned a Jewish girlfriend? He said "You getting to be a too wise guy, you getting to be a too smart Jew and we don't like smart Jews. We had enough of them." And I asked him, "Well, would you prefer stupid Jews?" He said, "Well, stupid Jews we send away fast. We also have to get rid of the wise guys, of the smart Jews who ask too many questions. You have no right to question me—I'm your superior." I said, "I don't want to be the superior's girlfriend. Let the superior find his own kind." "Very well," he said then, "we're going to send you to Poland where you belong. We're going to send you to the German soldiers. We had a request to send some Jewish flesh to the front. For the time being you can go home and think about it."

I went, and I didn't sleep for many nights. Knowing that my mother went through hell, I tried to talk to my father. He

was the kind who listened very carefully, and when I told him what had happened, he said he was glad I told him, and that they were going to try to do something about it.

We still went next Friday to report. My father also came with us, but they didn't let him in. The chief of police, knowing that my father was waiting outside, didn't make any propositions. He just looked with those wild eyes, and when we walked out he said, "You big mouth. You told your father, didn't you?" I didn't answer, because my father was there. But deep in my heart I felt I should take his bayonet and just hit him over his head—like my parents said, be whatever will be, will be. Yes, it's easy to say "whatever will be," but then, I was also brought up to think twice about what I do, to think twice about what I eat. Why do I have to think so much about what I do and what I eat? Why couldn't I just follow my urge to kick him in his fat belly, to kick this head of the police in his belly with my shoes—I had steel—covered shoes so the soles should last longer—just kick him or spit in his face? My God, how I would have loved to do it. I wondered to myself: What keeps me from it? Why do I always have second thoughts? I'm very hungry sometimes and I don't think how good the soup is—maybe because my mother made it. Why do I have to think twice?

The next few days we had to report to the police. It was a long way, It was usually an hour's walk. We had no more horses, since they were all taken away from us, my father and I walked very slowly. He was very upset, and in his walk I sensed that something was wrong. Then he said, "Let's sit down," he wanted to take a rest. And it was a beautiful day, the ground was still wet from the snow, which we used to have

a lot of in Jasina, a lot of snow. But we didn't mind. My father wore his long coat, and he put it under us. And he pulled out a delicious sandwich because I was so very hungry and because I loved so much what was in it. It was a big piece of black bread, which my father used to bake by himself, thinly spread with butter, and it was sprinkled with green scallions. For economical reasons he would cut off the tips and chop them into the bread, and it was a feast. But I told my father that I really wasn't hungry, that I wanted him to eat it, and he said, "No, young people have a harder time with hunger than older people." So we settled fifty-fifty. And it was the best meal in a long time. It was the fresh air, my father sharing with me some very important talk, and I was listening. And my heart beat one hundred miles an hour, ten miles a minute. He was telling me that things unfortunately would be much worse, and how powerless he was; that all the borders were closed, and he had no money—we never did have money. We had cows, we had sheep, but really no cash money, because my parents were so tied to the land. It was handed down to them, through maybe five generations. So the land sort of held them, since we grew all our food—potatoes, onions, beets, hay to feed the animals. We didn't have wheat, but we had cabbage.

My father had a good opportunity to teach me a few things for the war. He didn't say exactly that it was for the war, but he said, "Since you're young and beautiful, you need a few defenses. First, I'm sure you know from your grandfather how to keep clean. Even if you don't have soap and water, you should always scrub yourself with grass, even dirt, just to rub off the sweat, because the human sweat produces lice." I said to my father "Yes, my Zadeh" (my

grandfather, who was a scholar, who studied the Bible day and night) "taught me that in the course of teaching me the Bible." And then he said—although he didn't like saying it—"There's something else, but I really have a hard time telling you this, because I'm your father. It's like self-defense. If any man wants to come at you against your will, you should just kick him in the right place, that's between the two legs." And if I wanted to practice he would be glad to be my guinea pig. I started laughing, I said, "No, I don't need a guinea pig. If it comes to kicking I'm pretty good at it." And I thanked him and I said, "Don't worry, I shall remember those things." Little did I know at that time that I would really need it. And I used both things.

My Zadeh, his name was Labe, was a scholar. He would write books day and night. He would teach me the Bible in a way that a young child would be willing to listen. He also would teach me how to keep my body clean and my mind strong—strong to the point of being stubborn.

And as my father got up from the ground, after we finished the delicious scallion sandwich and we felt good, he said, "Well, on the way we might find a little water to have a drink." And as we walked looking for water, we came upon a little well. We could just take out and drink from the bucket. Suddenly my German teacher showed up on a bike. I was surprised to see him because I thought he had gone back to Germany. And he had that funny look on his face, and he said, "Ah, you little Jew, you are still here. I thought they mashed you up in that military prison." I said to him, "Oh, you big German, how come you're still here? How come you're not on the front fighting for your fatherland?" He said

that the Fuhrer had left him in Jasina to make sure that no Jew is left alive.

And then—after all the things I said to him—I said, "Well, since you claim you're a German, you should wash your greasy hair. You have so much dandruff it's dripping down on you. And your nose is always dirty and dripping." That sent him into a fury, and he started riding the bike, circling us. He wanted really to push my father down, but my father, being an excellent soldier from World War I, he knew how to avoid, and he taught me to avoid it too.

So he swung back and forth, circled back and forth to hit my father, and then he would of course have a free hand at me. And as he rode his bike up and down the hill where we were walking, suddenly I heard behind us a crash, and the big, dirty German fell. My father said, "Come on, my child. Let's walk fast and don't look back." It was a pretty good crash, and I felt really good.

And, although my father didn't even want to talk about it, he was going to write to Budapest to his friend—his friend that he had met on the front. They were in the First World War together, and he was now a medical doctor. Maybe he might be able to employ me somehow in Budapest so I wouldn't have to report to the police station every week, to the Gendarmes and all that business, and be abused. And I didn't say anything because at that time I thought I would not leave my family. Whatever had to be should be with us all together. I just couldn't.

But I managed to put a few words in. I said to him, "Well, how about Shandeleh, my older sister? She's just two years older. She's at a critical age too." He said to me that he was

going to see to it that my older sister Sophie should get married, and then Shandeleh would be free to marry. She was too much in love and she wouldn't want to leave Jasina. She was too much in love with Berl—that was Bernard. And I was happy. I said, "Did you overhear the conversation we used to have in the stable?" He said, "No, I didn't overhear the conversation, but when your mother delivered the hot soup to you, she sort of brought the papers, all the papers that you used to write when she gave you clean paper and new pencils, and we read it. And we understand that you're right, I definitely think you're right. We shouldn't hold Shandeleh captive, like she's in prison—she's in love. But you mother thinks she shouldn't get married; because there is an older sister. And believe me, if it's up to me I would have let her get married a long time ago, but you know your mother—the kind of person she is. First of all, she's not Sophie's mother and that makes her feel bad. She doesn't want her daughter to outshine her stepdaughter. And I don't want press it—too much—I don't want to hurt your mother. You know I'm eighteen years older than your mother, and she means everything to me, and I don't want to hurt her. But I'll make sure that Sophie gets married and out of the way of your sister. It was a very good thought. We also read Shlomo's little notes about how he used to teach you the Bible, which made me proud that a young kid like him remembers so much of it."

That discussion on the way back home was the best and the last. I never forgot all the training he was giving me—he was teaching me. He also taught me that if there was no food around and I ran across a certain grass, that I could chew on it. And with a little water it would keep me alive. And I laughed and said, "Well, I'm not a cow. How can I chew on

grass?" He said, "Yes." And he showed me certain flowers, and we tasted them on the way home. They were like spring flowers. They were like a little sour, but they had a pretty good taste to them.

And little did I know then that I'd be using all his advice. And little did he know—or he did know, maybe—that it was to be our last father-daughter discussion, because soon there would be chaos. Soon there would be chaos. Jasina became a battleground.

We came home, and my mother asked us where we were for so long. And my father told her that we had to stop and eat a good sandwich and talk a little bit. And he also told her that the German teacher, with the filthy hair and his filthy face, tried to kill him, and he fell on his bike. And that was the end of the discussion. Then we heard rumors that Hungary from one side and Germany from the other side were are going to invade part of Russia, the part of Russia that was occupied since they divided Poland. And of course that was another bad thing for us, because then the Germans would be parading through Jasina.

It didn't take long, and it was around June of '41 that the soldiers marched through—some Hungarian soldiers, and some German. They marched through Jasina, so fast, with such high hats and with such pride, and they said they were winning the war against Russia.

But they were not winning. It was just that Russia pulled back every time they felt they had not prepared to fight, or when they didn't want to be circled around—they pulled back. And the big heroes then occupied the so-called Poland; it was Poland before. And in no time they started together

Jewish people, like my best friends, my neighbors. They gathered them because they claimed that they didn't have Hungarian citizenship. Of course we were in that too. Not my father, but they found out that my mother's father was born in Poland—that's the one who was the scholar, who used to write books day and night.

So they sort of divided my mother—I mean they can find laws if they want to. They divided her with my sister Shandeleh, and my youngest two brothers and my baby sister.

And there was really a lot of commotion in Jasina when they deported two families. Both of the children went to school with me. They just took them, with all kinds of claims, and crossed them over. And they also brought big trains with Jewish people, and Jasina was the stop.

And my father somehow got flour—I don't know from where—but he would bake bread day and night, and make tea, and we would run out. We would run out to this camp to give the people some bread and tea and also towels. My mother would rip apart a big towel into four pieces, so every person should be able to get a towel. But after a few days of doing that, my parents sensed some danger in me and my sister going there. They never let my younger brothers go there because they might grab us and just send us off. So my father went by himself. He hired somebody, and all night he would bake. He would bake little rolls, so it didn't have to be sliced, so he could just throw it to the people and they could pick it up.

And it was really heartbreaking, a heartbreaking thing to do. And here we were—locked like in a shell, locked like in a shell. When I used to take this food to the people, to my Jewish brothers and sisters, I used to see the Hungarian

police kick them and yell at them: "You dirty Jews!" and all kinds of insults. And many, many young men and women, and many older ones—when they fought back, they were shot on the spot. Many of them. Of course nobody took down the names, and nobody wrote a hero book. Sometimes they even took whole families and they shot them, because one of the members dared to kick them back or spit at them.

And all this I saw with my own eyes. I used to say to myself, "I don't care. If my family would be somewhere in a safe place...how I would like to just kick these bastards, take their guns and just knock them off." But being always aware that my family was here, and what would happen to them, I could not take that risk. My God, I could not take that risk too, to hurt my family. And with my naive mind I still used to think to myself, "What did we ever do?" I mean we lived for generations here. I remember that my grandfather told me that in 1400, our people were in Jasina, and some sons of a bitches came from far away and started throwing their weight around us! What the hell is it? And where is the world—did the world clam up already? Or maybe they wouldn't mind if all the Jews were choked.

So they took them to Poland, and the secret wasn't too big. Of course, we were running also to get some papers—that my grandfather was born in Jasina, which we didn't have—but we still had some down feathers, excellent feathers, bags and bags of them, prepared like for every child to make them a cover, a down feather and cushions. So I found a customer that we could sell these feathers to, and we could pay the officials. That should erase that my father was...

Chapter Four

IT WAS QUITE, QUITE A HEAVY SUMMER. So much anxiety...so much hate went on. And of what I'd seen—how they dragged the Jewish people from Hungary, and from Vienna, and everywhere—they dragged them to Poland. They sure found in Poland a cemetery for the Jews, because in all Europe, the Germans didn't get as much help as in Poland: from the Polish people on one hand, and from the local Ukrainians on the other. I used to see people dragging their feet—some people ran away.

I planted vegetables and dug potatoes. This piece of land: they didn't forbid my parents to grow food on it and we used up every space. And it was an exceptionally good summer for growing. We had enough vegetables, we had enough potatoes, just from that tiny piece of land that wasn't forbidden territory. The rest was forbidden territory. It was confiscated. How dare the sons of a bitches confiscate land that belonged to my family in 1400? But who can question, who can talk?

There was just enough rain so everything could grow, and the people who still had a little life left in them were able to eat. But the terrible thing was for me to see whole families

go. It didn't take long, and we got word when a sister and brother came breathless to our house. And they were telling us that they had run away from a Polish town, which is in the south of Poland, the Ukraine. The girl was about my age, sixteen, and her brother was a little older. They were hungry and their clothes were torn by dogs and from hiding in the woods. I got some clothes for both of them, and shared the little bit of food that we had, because we hadn't yet harvested the potatoes. And I hid them in the same hiding place where we used to hide, and it was only I who knew about it, and my sister. And we didn't know what to do—how to get them further away from Jasina, because they would really be in trouble if they were caught.

The girl's name was Susan, and the guy's name was Gregory. They were Slovakian originally. They told us how their parents and two other brothers were first made to dig their graves in Komonitz Poroski, and then the Ukrainian police came and shot them. They were buried too, and they started to throw the land on them, and they were buried and somehow crawled out. They held each other's hands and they crawled out of the big pit. They were of course bloody from other people's bodies, and they threw away a lot of clothes. And what they had left was torn in shreds.

I helped them wash up, and I got them a few clean clothes, not much. Luckily it was summer; it was a nice, warm summer. And we used to share the food with them. Then who could I tell, and where could I get a little bit of advice on how to take them south, maybe to Budapest where there were a lot of people? They didn't know the language; that was another problem. But I got in touch with a girl who

left Jasina, and now was a maid in Budapest. And she found them a job-not with Jews, but with a Christian family—where the girl would be a maid, and her brother would be a gardener or chauffeur. If he didn't know how to drive they might teach him. But I had to get them some Christian papers, otherwise they would not be able to survive.

How do you get Christian papers if you're so naive like I was? You don't know anything about how to falsify. Of course my sister was much smarter. My sister, Shandeleh, she was the one who was so in love and two years older than I. She was much smarter, and she said that the Hungarians were really potato-heads, and they wouldn't understand nothing.

So we went in the camp where there were a lot of piles of papers, and we pulled out two certificates, birth certificates. And my sister erased where it said "Jewish," and also erased the second names and put Christian names on it. And somehow I got together a little money. I used to go to all my friends and ask for a little bit of money. And we put them on the train, we put them on the train to Budapest. We put them on very early in the morning, when everybody was asleep, the first train, because there weren't more than two trains—one in the morning, one in the evening.

So that they should arrive like in the evening rush hour, my girlfriend—called Rougenkof, which means "rose"—would wait for them and take them to their place of work. Well, my heart was beating as we said good-bye to each other, and in their eyes I saw their gratefulness and that they would never forget us. And I told them I would probably be heading to Budapest too, as my being here was very dangerous; maybe I would go to Budapest with my sister. So we said

good-bye to each other, and in two weeks my friend Rose sent me a little card, and she said, "Everything is okay. You cannot be in touch with them, because they are not Jewish anymore; they are Slovak peasants. And that's the way they will work, hopefully, hope to God, for the whole war, during the whole war." Well, I was grateful to God for that—we saved two young people. And it made my anger cool a bit, because I was so angry that all I was dreaming and all I was thinking about was: How I can kick a couple of the police, the Nazi police, the Gendarmes, take their guns and just knock their heads, blow their heads off? But why was I raised with so much restraint? Or was I worried about the safety of my family? Just maybe, just maybe we would slide through the war. That human hope against hope, with that human hope we carried on. You have to hope. In the worst situation you have to hope and pray, you have to believe.

In that year I still believed because I still had the warmth and love of my parents, my sisters. My two older brothers had left for Russia months before, and we didn't hear from them. I just used to watch my mother's face, her sad face when she walked out and looked at the stars, and just prayed to see her sons again.

That summer, after the transports stopped a little bit, my father didn't have to bake so much bread. For some reason the transports stopped for a few weeks, and the calmness, the calmness was a killer to me. The empty houses where my friends used to live, the three families that I knew, where there were empty houses now. That calmness in Jasina was really a terrible thing. Somehow my father once got dressed, and he went to Sighet. Sighet used to be Romanian. Now it

was united with our part of Czechoslovakia—and it all belonged to Hungary. He went to Sighet; I don't now why. But soon enough I found out that he had found a bride for my oldest brother, Max. And it didn't take long before there was a wedding; there was a wedding in the fall. And I was so glad that it was late in the fall, because we were able—especially my sister and I—to dig out the potatoes, the beets, the vegetables, the cabbages and just stash them away for the winter. It was an unusual summer for these food products. When I pulled out each bunch of potatoes they came out like giants, like never before. It was just as though God knew that we would be hungry, and there wouldn't be another good season. They were giant, and instead of getting six to eight, we would get eighteen to twenty-two potatoes from each pull. When I told my mother that, she said she didn't believe it. She said she had to come to the field, to watch for herself. So she came, and she started pulling with us, and sometimes there were even twenty-five potatoes under each pile. "Unbelievable," she said, "it's God's will and we must share it with somebody. We must share our good luck that we still have a piece of land."

Well, I thought that she was going to send a little bit of vegetables—cabbages, carrots, peppers, onions and beets and potatoes—to some poor people. We had some poor people. We had a woman who was blind and my mother would supply her with food. We had a couple of widows, my mother would send me every Friday with baked challas and some herring or some fish for Shabbat. But like the next day three girls came to the field. They were the girls from the city and I just knew that none of them really went to school past

eighth grade. Their mother was a widow and she had—I'm not sure—four or five daughters. But they were the ones who really embarrassed me. They came out with painted long nails, red polished nails, and they were sitting under the tree and laughing. And I walked up to them and I said, "What the hell do you do here? Why don't you go somewhere and find some work, so your mother doesn't have to work so hard? Help her out." And the middle one answered, "Well, we found some work. Here we are with a bag, with a sack, and we are waiting for you people to dig us out some potatoes and then we will take it home to our mother." And I said to her, "Get the hell off my field, because I'm going to throw the rake at you." They got really scared, because I was very tired and that was the fourth week of digging potatoes and vegetables and stashing them—cleaning them up, stashing them. And they ran to my mother to complain.

My mother came out and she called me aside and she said, "How can you? You should be ashamed of yourself. These are orphans." I said, "Yes, these are painted orphans, and I think they can work just as I do so they can have something to eat, instead of going around and begging. They should be ashamed of themselves." My mother calmed me, and she said, "Ssh, Ssh—be quiet. Let's just do what we do every year." I said, "I don't remember them last year, sitting on my neck and waiting for their rationing." She said, "Yes, I took it to them."

"Oh, you took it to them."

Well, it was just the respect that I was brought up with respect, to my mother, that kept me quiet. And I filled their bag and I yelled at them again: "Get the hell off my land!"

Well, soon I found out that one of the girls was pregnant, that she was sleeping around with every Gendarme, with every Nazi policeman. And the other one had already had a baby. And then I saw them—one pregnant and one with a baby in her hand—they were deported to Poland. The guys that they schlepped around with were the ones that dragged them up to the camp. There was new action in the camp again for a while, and they were the ones who were dragged up. Well, it bothered me and it hurt me. But I would have rather heard that they had kicked the guys instead of going to bed with them and having their babies. Who the hell were these masters for?

So as usual, my back and my sister Shandeleh's back were aching, but we were overjoyed, for the time being anyway. We filled bags and bags of potatoes. We helped my parents chop up the cabbage, which they would pickle. We picked up a few apples, those that the bastard Nazis didn't pick up, and my mother chopped them up and pickled the cabbage and the beets. And we even had a few chickens and a few eggs. And the Jewish New Year rolled around, and I felt a little bit of peace—not with myself, but just because my family would still have food for the winter to come. And we fasted—it was Yom Kippur, and right after Yom Kippur we went to Sighet, as our father informed us that our oldest brother Max was going to get married. What kind of marriage can Jewish people make these days I didn't know. I didn't know the people, the family he was going to marry into. And I didn't really want to go to the wedding, but my father insisted. He insisted that I must come and of course my older sister Sophie must come—and he had a reason why—and my

sister Shandeleh. My mother stayed home with the younger brothers and my baby sister.

We came to the wedding and there was the rabbi. A very nice family: there were three sisters, and my brother married the oldest sister. And there was the rabbi in the house, and he gave them the chuppah right in the house. And after that there was a very nice simple dinner, prepared by the family. And we sat around and we talked, and I saw my sister-in-law's—her name was Rose too—brother, her older brother, draw his eyes to my older sister Sophie, and I said to Shandeleh, "You see, you might still be married soon to the guy you are in love with. If this works." And she started to say to me, "Be quiet—you big mouth. You always stick your mouth in where you don't belong. Just be quiet." I said, "Okay, I'll be quiet," and then I walked up to my brother's brother-in-law. He was a handsome, tall guy, and his name was Herman—Hirsch. And I said to him, "You are not married, are you, Hirsch?" He said, "No, of course not." He said, "Why, do you want to marry me?" I said "No, I'm a little nothing, a little sixteen-year-old nothing. No, I don't want to marry you, but I would like you to marry my older sister."

"Oh," he said "so you're a matchmaker."

"Sort of—helping my father out."

"Okay," he said, "I shall take you up on that. How much do you charge?"

I said, "I'll tell you what I like to charge. You see these strap sandals with the high heels? I stole them from Sophie—to dress up. And if you get engaged to Sophie I want the same sandals."

My God, if I think back—what a stupid little girl. The stupidity of young people keeps them going. The light-headedness of all this keeps them going.

He said, "Fine. Let's settle Max and Rose. And then I will probably visit Jasina—I will come to visit your sister."

My stupid sister Sophie: every time he would go close to her she pulled away. She pulled away from him because way back in Jasina she had a little midget for a boyfriend—the little midget. His name was Sam Grawer. He was a bookkeeper in a local lumberyard, and he would have loved to marry Sophie, but he couldn't because he was overshadowed by two older fat, ugly sisters. So that was never-ending.

My father called me aside, and said, "Okay, troublemaker, what's on your mind now—what are you doing? I heard you talking to Herman. Well, it wasn't really nice for a sixteen-year-old girl to do that, but what did you say to him?" I said, "I don't beat around the bush. I proposed to him he should marry Sophie." My father laughed all the way home. We left for home by train, and he laughed, and Sophie started to give me the mad looks. I don't know why she gave the mad looks—because I stole her high-heeled red sandals, or maybe she overheard what I said to Herman. But I knew I shouldn't talk to Sophie because my mother trained me so. My mother had said, "All of you give her respect and don't you disagree with her." You see, my mother was her stepmother.

So we came home. And I still reported to the police, but this supervisor, the head of police, wasn't there for a while, and that was a little bit better. My father suggested I should put on my grandmother's old, long dress, and a hanky. I should look like a babushka so they would leave me alone. I

did that, and it sort of worked. They really ignored me, which was a great feeling, to be at peace again.

For a few weeks we were really living a little bit—we just missed my two brothers who were forced to run away to Russia. And as the snow came down, the tragedies came down again. The people started to run from Poland—Jewish young men and women. They ran across the border. Many of them were caught and tied to a snow sled, and the Gendarmes dragged them. When I saw this once I screamed so much, I screamed so much that one got off and with a belt—or what do you call it in English? What he was driving the horses with—he started to beat me. I didn't mind, because I just hoped that it would give the man a chance to run away. Well, he couldn't run away. He was tied pretty good. One thing I did, I kicked them back and I spit at them. And the other one who was sitting there, he said, "We better hurry up, because we don't want nobody else to see this."

Well, that horror came back to me, and I couldn't sleep again, and I couldn't walk around because the house was so small—I didn't want to alert my parents to how terrible I felt, or especially my younger brothers and my little sister. And as I had my petroleum lamp on I tried to read. The books were taken away from us, and the books that my grandfather wrote—my Zadeh—my mother sold for a little bit of money helped us pull through. They were very valuable books. I wish I could find them today, but I don't know where they are.

Somebody was knocking on the door, and there came a young man, but he didn't look too young. He told me he was twenty-eight. He said, "Please, God, help me here. I run away from shooting. I run through the border. I beg of you

help me." I held his mouth, and I closed the petroleum lamp, and I said, "You must be quiet." I spoke in Yiddish. "You must be quiet." And in the dark I gave him a hot cup of tea, because in the winter we had the oven on always with wood and hot water because it was so terribly cold. I gave him hot tea. And his feet were wet, and I wrapped them with some rags because we didn't have any shoes his size—we didn't have any shoes, period.

Then I went around the neighborhood. I took off my shoes and I went down to what was the town, and I wore just wrapped around schmatas on my feet, and I went from door to door to beg a pair of shoes. And I made sure that they would be bigger than what I wore. So they gave me three pair of shoes—I felt so rich, and came home with the wrapped—around rags on my feet.

And I was lucky my sister saw me before my mother saw me. She said, "Get lost. Mommy's worried about where you are and if you are carrying on again. What is it that you are carrying on? Who is in the stable?" I said, "Keep quiet. You know who is in the stable—the man who ran away." My sister said, "You cannot do this, because you gonna really kill our parents and the younger children. If you want to do it on your own, do it, but not here." I said, "Where could I do it? I don't have a special house or anywhere to do it. And I cannot let this guy out. I never forget the way they dragged a Jewish guy—maybe even younger than twenty-eight—they tied him to a sled and dragged him. He was bloody all over. You want to see another picture like? Well, I don't. I'd rather die."

So somehow we went through the back door in the stable. And I got this man—his name was Sasha—I got him

shoes, and I got him some clothing, and I dressed him up. And his eyes, his eyes were grateful, and he said, "Well I know that I cannot be here. And I heard what your sister said to you, and what are you gonna do?" I said, "I'm gonna try to do the same thing I did for a sister and brother just a few months ago, and I hope to God I succeed."

Well, it was in the winter and it was terribly cold. The hay was almost gone, and the little bit of hay that was left wasn't enough to keep him warm, and I couldn't take him in the house. He had a piece of paper in his pocket—Sasha Moskovitch. I went and I did what my sister had done before. And the Sasha was fine—that was a kosher name—and instead of Moskovitch I left the first five letters, and "vitch" I erased. And also the different place where he was born, like in Jasina. And I said, "Now, I'm going to beg a little money because we don't have it. Just enough for you for a ticket to Budapest. And there you have to get lost by yourself."

"Can't you give me any names or addresses?" he said.

I said, "I'm gonna give you an address, but you have to be very careful because this girl has already enough on her head. And the mail I write to her, I don't know if it will get to her. She didn't write me for a long time." And I couldn't put him on the train in Jasina, so we hitchhiked on a sled. We hitchhiked to the next town which was Rakov. And I put him on the train there. And in two weeks he wrote me a postcard that he got to Budapest and was working in a factory, and he said, "God bless you, and I hope you have all the strength to help more people." But the strength I didn't have—the fear was terrible, not so much for myself but for my parents.

And in the meantime it was like already close to

Chanukah. And I came home—I don't remember where I had been really—but I came home and I saw this Herman...my brother's brother-in-law in the house, and he had with him whiskey and cake. And he said to me, "Well, here I am. I listened to this young matchmaker. And I even have your red sandals for you—what size do you wear?" I laughed, I giggled—it felt so good to laugh again—it felt so good I kissed him. And I also welcomed him home as my brother, and he came ready with everything to make an engagement with Sophie. But unfortunately my sister, she wasn't too smart, and she ran in the stable to hide. I followed her and I said, "What are you hiding for, stupid? Can't you exchange a tall, good-looking guy who really loves you, wants to marry you, for that shrimp?" She said, "Get out of here. You're always a troublemaker, and I don't want to see you." I said, "Fine. I'm gonna tell Shmuel Grawer, your shrimpy boyfriend, that you're getting engaged." She said, "You do that and I will kill you." "Fine," I said.

And I went, and as he walked home from his job, I put my arm around him—I was much taller than him. I said, "Well, Shmuel, you waited so long—Sophie's getting engaged. Now you can wait forever 'til your spinster sisters get married." He kicked me, and he pushed me down, and then lifted me up, and cried, and he said, "Oh, I'm very sorry, my child. Why should I it out on you?" I said, "Don't worry, Shmuel, nothing happened. Nothing happened." "I'm not worried about you," he said, "I'm worried about myself. Now I lost my girl." I said, "If your girl would have had any sachel, that means any sense, you would have lost her a long time ago. I mean, how long do you expect her to wait for

you? By the way, I'm inviting you to the engagement tonight."

Well, Herman was sitting at the house, the house was specially cleaned, and I guess they knew he was coming. And it was pleasant, the smell of tea—the tea was a tea from dried apple peel. My mother peeled the apples. She would put them into the cabbage, and the peels she would dry up. And it was a delicious smell and a delicious tea, amazing—from dried apple—tea, what kind of a tea. And of course Herman had some whiskey on him and some wine and some cake. In Sighet there was more food still for the Jews, not like in Jasina. And he had this beautiful engagement ring which I loved. Not so much because it was gold and beautiful—but because it was an engagement ring. I sort of used to think more about Shandeleh, since she was so in love and she was so kept back.

And I told him so—and I was the happiest, the happiest machtaynis for that evening. I carried on. The few neighbors we still had left came in. Even my mother's two friends—the non-Jewish neighbors that would later send her to her death because they wanted the candelabras she had inherited from her mother—even they were in. And it was sort of a short, happy evening, and the engagement went through. I got my red sandals, even though I couldn't wear them because the snow was too deep at that time. But I felt good, I felt really good.

Herman left the next day, because we didn't have that much room to put him up. And he told Sophie that he would be waiting for her, that she should come Thursday. He would wait near the train for her and he gave her a train ticket. He probably understood there was no money in the family.

Well, it took us a long time, but we talked her into it, and she got herself a beautiful pair of boots. How he knew the size, I don't know. And she took the train and she went. And that felt great—these few days were short-lived happiness. Of course my sister never married him, because after they were engaged and they were set up-set up the wedding for the spring of '42, and they were buying furniture and they were supposed to live in Sighet, not in Jasina, which I was glad about too—they took Herman into the working camp. They called it a working camp, but I call it a slaughter camp. And my sister never saw him again. So there was her heart broken. And my sister Shandeleh never got married either, because they took Bernard into the working camp too. Of course he survived, which I will talk about later. He survived—he ran away many times and wound up in Budapest. I met him later in Budapest. And all he wanted was to get Shandeleh, but she wouldn't leave my parents—which was a mistake, a big mistake. And I told her so.

Just like the summer was beautiful—warm and enough rain so we could grow food for the family, and give away a little bit—the winter was exceptionally cruel, exceptionally cold. And we didn't have enough wood to heat the house, so we would just sort of put one on log at a time to keep it warm. Luckily we still had enough warm clothing. So, the only things that would heat us really were the potatoes, and the delicious potato soup my mother made, the tea, and ration of bread—the Jews of course got much less than the others. And by the time we went to get the ration of flour, a lot of it had been stolen. But somehow my father used to mix in mashed potatoes, which were plentiful then, and made the

delicious bread—flat. It was very good—I never forget the smell of it. It's really funny how security goes with love and food too. The warm smell of the food, of the hot tea from the apple peel, is something that I never forget, something that I always think about when I want to escape some hardships—even in today's life.

I didn't know what would happen during the winter, and I hoped that by the spring I would be able to go to Budapest. Of course I didn't want to leave my parents, but I wasn't good for my parents, I wasn't good for them. They were afraid because I was a young girl, and they were dragging the young girls away; they were afraid because I talked back to the police. And my father explained to me again, in a very short sentence, that it would be better for the family if I were to leave. And as soon as he would get word from his friend, who was a doctor in Budapest—it was the friend he was together with in the First World War; his name was Dr. Rosenock—it would be relief to my family. I understood it perfectly well, because the madness boiled in me.

Chapter Five

ONE EARLY MORNING there was again a knock on the door. It was a frozen day—and you walked on the snow and it was crisp and frozen. There was such a cold wind and it was blowing. So as not think constantly about the cold, I used to—sort of in my mind—imagine that my brother and I would convert the wind, the blowing wind, into sort of music. And my brother even wrote it down on a piece of paper.

There was a knock on the door again, this time on the back door, and in came like a frosty man: a frosty, short man. I don't know how old he was; I didn't have a chance to ask him. All I had a chance to do was to give him a cup of hot tea and a piece of bread. And he swallowed it and went along. I didn't have a chance to ask anything—immediately the Gendarmes followed him. Immediately they grabbed me and him. Immediately. They didn't even take us down to the police station or anything—they loaded us on a truck, on a slat, which they called a truck, and drove us across the border and dropped us off on the other side of the border. I had never been to the other side, but things were very familiar to me. And he only worried about me: "What's gonna be with you?" he said. He didn't care, he didn't care, he had nobody

to live for because all his family had been killed already by the Ukrainians, and he was the only one who had run away—now he got me in trouble. I said to him, "Don't you worry about me. I'm glad that my parents, that they didn't drag them, because I have three younger brothers too, and a small baby sister."

Well, somehow we didn't fit in anywhere, so they placed us both with a German family, to work for them. And he was quite content. He was cleaning up the toilets and everything. They put me in the kitchen to work. There was so much food there, that I don't remember ever seeing in my whole life so much meat. We had cows, we had sheep: how much meat they would eat, how much booze.

We were placed there, and he told me, "You should never say that you're Jewish—never! You keep saying that you are a Ukrainian girl, that you just came there to work." And I said to him, "How about you?" He said, "With me—I don't know what will be with me. I'm going to try to deny." What they would do, they would pull down the pants and look because only the Jews were circumcised in those days. And then he told me, "If you have a chance—they gonna use you—if you have a chance, keep running. I don't know where you should run, but don't stay still."

Well, I was working there a couple of months, and I got pretty good and fat from all that food. Of course we didn't get much in the kitchen, but the cook—I was her helper—the cook was a Polish cook. She probably was about two hundred kilo, which was almost four hundred pounds. She used to give me some food. I didn't dare to take more than my ration. And she would eat—My God, it would make me sick-

how she would eat. Her breakfast would consist of sausages—she would chop them in with onions, with green peppers and about six eggs. And she would sit down and eat, and I couldn't stand it—it would make me throw up the way she ate. And it bothered her that I could not stand the way she ate, so she would throw me some—like to a dog. Of course I wasn't that hungry, and after eating a little bit I lost my appetite completely.

So I worked there, and then I heard that a truck was gonna go to Budapest. A truck , and I didn't know what was on that truck. I tried to ask cautiously—carefully, very carefully—the cook. And she said, "What do you want to know for? You want a boyfriend—I have a lot of boyfriends." I said, "No, I'm just curious—I mean, what would go from Poland to Budapest?" She said, "We sending meat there—they supposedly are hungry." Well, it was no meat; it was filled with barrels of wind, full barrels of wine they were sending to Budapest. Great! And I said, "When is the truck going?" And they told me.

So, it was already like in the spring of '42, and once I nudged my friend when he was cleaning up the horses. And I asked him, I said, "What should I do?" And he said, "Definitely, if you can hop on that truck, go—by all means. You have nothing to lose." And again he apologized for the hardship he had given me, that I had been caught with him.

So we said good-bye to each other, as they were loading on the barrels of wine, which they stole somewhere. And really they were taking them across the border to sell them. The chauffeur was part of the thief ring. And there was just one other guy sitting in the front. As they were loading them,

I just hopped in between the barrels. And the truck was going at such speed that in no time—I probably fell asleep—in no time we were in Budapest. And when they tried to unload the barrels, the chauffeur got a glimpse of me, and he looked at me with these stupid mean eyes: "There is a piece of young flesh I'm going to get myself." Then I started yelling at him, "You're a thief—you stole this wine. Where did you steal it? I'm going to tell the officials." He said, "Get the hell out of my truck. I don't want to see you." This was exactly what I wanted to hear. I got out so fast. Now where should I go? I could not go to my girlfriend Rose. I had sent her already three people that she saved. I tried to remember—my father's friend's—name. And it didn't come to me for a long while, so I walked through the streets. And I was dressed pretty decently, so nobody was suspicious of me.

Then suddenly, when I came to this "Keeryutsa"—which means like "the crowned street"; "Keerye" or the "king's street"—something hit my memories: "Oh, this is where my father would write it." How ignorant could I be that my father used to correspond with his friend and I would mail the letters and yet never pay attention to the name and address. But in no time I saw a shingle: Dr. Rosenock. Could it be the same doctor? I decided I was going to walk up and down this Keeryutsa.

It was pretty early in the morning in the spring of '42, and it was a beautiful city. I had never been to a city—it was so strange for me seeing the trolleys. They were still delivering milk on horse and buggies. The old buildings—I couldn't get over them—I would go like dizzy and just look at them. And then I would have to pinch myself: "My God, you're stupid.

Remember you're Jewish and you're in a strange city. You better find somewhere or you'll be dead." And of course I had promised my father that they would not get me alive. They would not get me alive—dead, yes, but not alive. So keep the promise, keep the promise, I told myself.

So what was I going to do? I didn't know much Hungarian yet, but since the war started I had learned a little bit. And I was able to read on the shingle that office hours were every day between four and six. I said to myself, I'm just gonna go into the office like a patient. But how the hell can you go into an office without money? So what? I'll tell him I'm poor—I'm a poor orphan, I don't have money. And I remembered what I had heard from my father, that he was a kind gentleman, a very religious man—just like my father—that he wouldn't ignore me. Suppose it was another Rosenock? Suppose it was somebody who was German and he was Rosenock—Dr. Rosenock. Well, heck, so I kick him. I'll kick him, I'll break his glasses, I'll punch him—I'm such a big hero I can do everything, I said to myself.

So I went upstairs. I was afraid. I didn't know that people went up in elevators; I had never seen any. In Jasina we didn't have elevators. I was really like a little peasant girl—not so little, but a peasant girl come into the city like a wild animal. So I walked up the steps—they were quite high—all the way to the fourth floor. You had to ring the bell, get into an elevator (which I found out later), and go up like an intelligent, civilized person. Well, in Jasina we didn't have elevators, we didn't have back steps—I didn't know. So I got there, and I walked in, into the office. Out comes a tall woman, around forty, and she talks to me. She said to me, "What are

you doing here? What do you want?" And I said to her in broken Hungarian, "I want to see Dr. Rosenock." She said, "He's busy. He just takes people by appointment."

I thought to myself, just play the game somehow. And I remembered what that Gendarme told me: Why was I standing up and letting myself be beat? Why didn't I fall down and play sick? Well of course I tried to be a hero. And not to get weak. My Zadeh, that is my grandfather, taught me: "Be strong—train yourself to withstand any hardship and you'll make it." I tried to do just that, but in that office I felt that I must do something, or this girl, the receptionist they called her...well, she was a combination maid and receptionist. This is the way they employed them there. As a maid she wore an apron and a different cap, like a maid's cap—white—and as a receptionist she wore her own clothes with a name tag. Suddenly I pretended I didn't feel good, and I slumped into a chair. And the doctor immediately came out, and he took me into his office. I took a look at him and I saw everything my father had described: a short man with kind brown eyes, with gentle hands. And he started to examine me. I started to tell him in German—I didn't want the woman to understand—that he should send her away, that I had something to tell him. And he told her, which I did understand, "This child is sick. Go..."

So I had asked Dr. Rosenock to send his receptionist out, and he obliged. He knew that my German was typical German, and he sort of understood that I had a big secret to tell him. He sent her out, and then I asked him one question: if he knew a man by the name of Joseph _____. He got so excited—he just looked at me, stared at me, maybe for

ten seconds—and then he said to me, "My God, how did you get here? Your father wrote to me that they dragged off you and the guy who ran away from Poland. He has no idea where you are." And he stopped again and couldn't talk, and I couldn't talk. He started to cry, and so did I. And that probably lasted for half an hour. He heard a knock on the door, and it was his wife. She came in—I guest Margaret the maid had told her that there was a very sick girl in the office. And his wife, seeing the tears in our eyes, knew that something special was going on. And she talked to him and talked to him, and then she started to pat my head, and hug me. And she didn't know German I guess, but she told me in very slow Hungarian, "Don't worry. Everything be okay."

I probably was pretty dirty, because the first thing she gave me was a towel and she sent me to the bathroom. A bathroom! I had never seen a bathroom. Our bathroom was a wooden bathtub, that we filled with heated water. We didn't have running water.

So they sent me to the bathroom, and I washed up a little. I saw a mirror—the first time in a long time. I realized how horrible I looked. They were amazed that some Nazi didn't catch me in the streets of Budapest. And I said to myself, "Nobody could catch me or ever will. Not alive, anyway; maybe dead." Big, big hero—that's what I thought. You really cannot be a big hero, if they catch you and they are armed and you are not. But I put on very big hero act.

The first thing they gave me to eat was so good I didn't believe my eyes that it still existed. It was like a cherry cake, it had cherries—not too many on top. It was a dough on the bottom and on top it was cherry cake—and a glass of milk.

My God—milk? I hadn't seen milk for a year. In Jasina there was nowhere to buy milk—the cows they took away from us. And of course the Nazis weren't going to give me milk. I only had leftovers—what that big, fat maid had left over—so I ate. But even that was enough to feed five people.

So they watched me, how I gobbled the food up—they both watched me. And what they told that girl, that woman Margaret—I don't know—I really didn't understand or hear them talk or anything. So they watched me gobble up that cherry cake and the milk, and they constantly watched me. And then Margaret showed me her room, her tiny room which was the maid's room next to the kitchen. She said they were gonna try to get a bed so I should sleep with her. And that scared me, because I was afraid I might talk at night. So I told that to Dr. Rosenock. He said, "Calm down, you have nothing to worry about. Not that we trust her, but she sure isn't going to—she doesn't know who you are really. I just told her that you were lost on the street, and you sort of don't know your way, and we're going to keep you here for a while."

So, the next thing I knew, they put up some kind of a cot in her small room, and I was sleeping. I was going to sleep at like eight in the evening, and I would sleep through to the next morning at eight. I was so dead tired, maybe it was the first time in months that I was able just to sleep, and not to worry who was going to stab me at night, or who was going to grab me and drag me off somewhere else. I did yell, I did scream, the girl told me, at night. I remember having a nightmare about riding in the truck and fearing that if they opened the truck on the road where nobody was, then I would be finished—that would be the end of me.

In the morning when I woke up they gave me a hot chocolate. Hot chocolate!! My God, that's not for poor people. A cup of hot chocolate milk, and a piece of bread and butter. And I was amazed that they still had so much food there. Chocolate milk, milk, cherry cake—I couldn't believe it. "Is this another world, or is it the same rotten, bloody world I come from?" These are the questions I asked myself quietly.

After I ate I was told that that day I could walk around a little bit. But then I told them I had no papers, I was afraid I had absolutely nothing. And I was afraid to walk around. I would rather do some work—could they give me some work? And the doctor was away in the hospital, and I asked his wife if later he possibly could write a postcard to tell my parents that I was alive, they really didn't know where I was—I couldn't write to them, there was no way. So she calmed me down and she said Dr. Rosenock wrote my father a postcard last night and mailed it already. So they would know—maybe it would take ten, fifteen days—but they would know I was alive and well. Then I just couldn't talk to her. All I asked is some form of work, and she gave me a dusting rag and she said, "Why don't you help Margaret dust?" And I did that gladly. It was like a vacation from the work I had gone through before.

Then when noon came around they gave me a very delicious lunch which was cheese—My God, cheese! I hadn't seen that in years. Cheese and bread. They gave me tea. Tea was familiar, but this was real tea—which really didn't taste as good as my mother's tea from dried apple peel. It was really hard, I didn't know the language so god, and I didn't really know Mrs. Rosenock. The doctor's wife was a kind woman, but she had such a stern look on her face that I did-

n't feel as comfortable to her as to her husband—maybe because I heard so much about him from my father.

So then when he came home from the hospital—they served him lunch in the dining room—we ate in the kitchen. After that I assume he probably took a nap, because he had office hours every afternoon. I really was sort of left to do nothing. And I went to Mrs. Rosenock and I said, "I hate to be a pest, but I could sew or fix you something or iron." So she was glad, she gave me a few things to iron, and apparently I did a good job because she was pleased.

And after the evening meal I tried to talk to Dr. Rosenock. He said, "Look, I'm busy right now. I wrote to your father and tried to get you some papers so you can walk around. And remember you are not Jewish from now on. But I don't want you to walk around late, because if they stop you in the street then you—you'll be back where you came from."

A few weeks after I arrived in Dr. Rosenock's office, I started to tell him a few things about what had happened after I left Jasina. He told me that just then he wouldn't have the time to listen and he really wanted to listen—because my father wrote to him and was quite upset, and wanted to know what was going on. And he told me had written my father that he would try to take care of me as much as he could.

That gave me a little bit of relief, and as I helped around the apartment I was amazed at the big, giant rooms, and all the food they still had in Budapest. All the different kinds of foods. I couldn't go outside yet by myself, because I didn't have papers, and my language was really poor. So I used to go with Mrs. Rosenock, with the doctor's wife. She was a

very sweet lady, but I had a feeling that she wasn't too happy with my visit.

In a few weeks Margaret left, and that gave Dr. Rosenock a real opportunity to question me and to talk. What I was very surprised about was how religious he was. He would put on the tallis and tefillin every morning and pray, and they were kosher. And on Shabbat he didn't work—he tried not to, but of course he was a very devoted physician. When there was an emergency or surgery he would go in; otherwise he tried to avoid it. And I was really surprised about that, because living in a big city...Of course I really didn't know his background. My father just told me he was a good friend and that's all—from the army, from the First World War.

So one evening he came home, and had a light—well, I shouldn't call it dinner because in Budapest they ate a big meal at noontime. And he didn't have office hours that afternoon, so he just had some toast and tea, and they called me into the big dining room—I used to eat in the kitchen with Margaret, but when she wasn't there I used to eat in the dining room with them, with Mrs. Rosenock and the doctor. And we started to talk, and he wanted to know exactly what happened in Jasina, because my father couldn't write him everything—he was afraid of censorship. And I told him how the Hungarians occupied it, how they kicked out the Czechoslovakian officials; how they didn't let them through and that they had to go back to Poland; how they confiscated our cows. And he said, "You mean to tell me they took all thirty of your cows and didn't leave you one?" I said, "No. And they took our sheep. I don't remember how many we had that year." "And how do you live now?" he asked me.

"Well," I said, "we were lucky." Last summer we had a lot of vegetables, cabbage and potatoes."

And we were talking and talking, and then he asked, "Well, what happened to you that they snatched you away with this guy? Who was this guy?" I said, "This guy ran away from Poland—but maybe he ran away from the dead holes."

They made the Jews dig out holes—like in Kominitz Poroski—they made them dig big graves, and there were our neighbors, our two neighbors; their children went to the same school with me. One of them was named Abash, the other ones I really don't remember—they had several and they all went to school with me.

And they probably died there. Probably they didn't manage to get out—or maybe somehow they did. Many of the people were shot right in Jasina when they fought back against the Gendarmes, the Hungarian Border Police. And they kicked them back—they pushed them—and they didn't let themselves be pushed. So they were shot—many of the them—nameless young people. Nameless. Many hundreds.

And then I—I talked and talked. And I felt Mrs. Rosenock pull on my dress and she said I should stop it. When I looked up they were both crying. And suddenly I started crying. And I told them, "God—I don't know why I'm crying now—I didn't cry for years. I just try to be hardened and not to cry." Well, he gave me a hug and he said, "You are among friends here and you feel relaxed and at ease, and you just show your feelings." Well, we cried a little bit, and then he wiped my tears and his, and his wife said she was sorry, but she could not stay anymore—she was tired—and she went to bed. And he wanted to know exactly how I got to Poland.

And I told him that they suddenly snatched us, and I was very lucky that they didn't grab my parents, because everywhere they would find a runaway—a person coming in from Poland—they would take the whole family. It was nothing short of a miracle that they didn't take my parents. And they just dumped us in a truck, and they crossed us over the border, and we didn't talk to each other and acted like we didn't know each other. Well, then I said to myself, "Well, they're taking us to be shot." And he shook his head, the guy, and he said, "Yeah, it looks like they're going to shoot us at the border."

Across the border, I told Dr. Rosenock, there was another miracle. They took us into this big mansion, and there were a few German officers with their girlfriends or their wives—I really don't know; I was afraid to even look up. And right away they pulled me into the kitchen and showed me what to do. They—I don't know—they probably just needed quick servants. They didn't ask Jew or Christian from me—Jewish or not Jewish. But the guy told me before we parted that we should never talk again to each other—at least one of us should survive. And the minute I had a chance I should run.

Well I couldn't believe my eyes—the food there was. Then once, this big, fat cook—big, fat Polish cook—she opened the door a bit, and she explained that I should never look through that door. That door was loaded with money—dollars, gold, all kinds of jewelry, all kinds of furs. And then she said to me, "You look like an educated Slav. Do you know how to read this?" I said, "No, I don't know how to read these things." But I did know—they were bonds, international bonds from Swiss banks. And I took them upside down, just to deceive her. "Na—I don't know. I'm a peasant, I don't

know how to read it." "Yes," she said, "a peasant you are. You're even stupider than I am. You don't know how to read. Well, let's go back to work." Back to work—to sit down and eat. God Almighty, I have never seen anybody eating like that. When she used to chew that food—the meat and the eggs, and so much bread, and so much cake—I used to get sick. To me it looked as though she was chewing live flesh and the blood was dripping from her mouth.

I didn't see too much more of the Germans, I told Dr. Rosenock—maybe because I just didn't want to see them. I was just in the kitchen. Going to sleep at night I was petrified—I was petrified knowing I shouldn't talk Yiddish, because I used to talk during my sleep. So I would try not to sleep much, but when I heard this fat slob snoring next door, I would really fall asleep, and tuck myself all the way in and cover my face, so that if I talked they wouldn't understand what I was saying.

Well, after six weeks I heard that they were getting ready to go with the truck. The cook was talking to one of the guys with whom she was sleeping. They were getting ready to smuggle this wine—barrels of wine in the truck. And he was telling her in German that the truck was half loaded. And I said to myself, "This is your last chance to get out alive." And I hopped on the truck, and I knew they were leaving that evening. And I was so cold, and somehow I scratched my face. The only luck I had was that they didn't stop anywhere. They went fast to get to Budapest.

"My God, my child," said the doctor, "how did you do it? Weren't you scared?"

"Oh, Dr. Rosenock—there was no time to think, there

was no time to be scared. What I learned, in the last few years, is that the worst predicament in this world is to have no choice—when you have no choice, no alternatives. You do many things and you don't think; you just take the risk. Of course I took the risk also when I smuggled three people to Budapest." He said, "Did you do that?" I said "Yes. Two of them, a sister and a brother live in Budapest, but they don't get together, so nobody should know that they're in Budapest. And my friend Rosie is here; she helped. And another guy who's a Polish guy—he's somewhere here too. I'm not sure where he is, but I hope to God he's in Budapest. We put them on the train."

"Oh, my child, at your age—you're lucky you were able to save three lives." I said, "I just hope that I was able to save them. Please, Dr. Rosenock, please let me go out, let me visit my girlfriend Rosie." And I told him about her, that she worked with a dentist, but they didn't know she was Jewish. And he said to me, "What?! This dentist? This son of a bitch? He's Jewish himself!! He's a paralyzed Jew, who taught his maid how to fix teeth, and she works without a license...so that's where Rose works!" I said, "Yeah, please be quiet. She is working there just to get away from it, she sends back her money to her parents to support them—because they took away everything from them too. And I would like to get a job to be able to send my parents some money." He said, "Don't worry, my child. You will be here for the next month or so 'til Margaret gets back, and we will train you a little bit. And then after the summer, when my daughter and son—in—law—he's a lawyer—when they come back, then you will go over and work for them. And

you will be able to send your parents some money—or whatever you want to."

I was very grateful to him, and I said again that I wanted to see Rosie, because she would be able to help me. He said that he was gonna ask Mrs. Rosenock to walk me over there. He still was afraid for me to go by myself, without papers, and with my bad Hungarian. And he said, "Your face is still scratched and after that heals you will be able to go. And we are gonna try to get you some papers." I was thinking that I had a bicycle permit with a picture at home. I mean, you needed a license to drive a bicycle. Not in the Czechoslovakian regime, but under the Hungarians. I told the doctor about this permit, and I said, "If I could write my parents, or if I could ask somebody to write—" I didn't dare ask him to write again. He said, "Yeah? You have a bicycle permit, with a picture? I'm going to ask your father—write to him in code. Maybe he will understand and mail it to us."

Well, immediately he wrote to my father, but the permit didn't come. My father was afraid to put it in the mail. But somehow, somebody brought it to the door a month later. And the person who brought it—I never saw him—but Mrs. Rosenock took the envelope and in there was my bicycle permit. So then I gave them the idea of how my sister and I doctored documents—how we erased names and put different names on—and they did that. And Dr. Rosenock named me "Ilana Kovatch," a real Hungarian name. And we wrote it down, and he said that he didn't think anybody would stop me in Budapest as long as I didn't get into any problems—not yet anyway.

So in a few weeks, I felt free: I was able to walk around. I

was able to go to the supermarket—not the supermarket exactly, it was like a street market to buy fruits and vegetables. I was standing there like a real small—town peasant and looking at how much food there was—fresh fruits, vegetables, and how much money the people had to spend—and all the time my mind was back home. My mind was back home, thinking how great it would be if my parents could be there and they could buy some of that food instead of struggling so much.

Chapter Six

BUDAPEST 1942, it was a different world. I used to think to myself that I was somewhere else—it couldn't be the same planet. The beautiful street cafes, where beautifully—dressed people were sitting eating delicious food, laughing—My God, it was not that far from Jasina. How could there be such a big, different world?

I walked the street, and my mind, my heart, were with my parents and sisters and brothers. I couldn't understand why, after my older sister Sophie came to visit Budapest in 1940, she went back to Jasina. What the hell kept her in Jasina? Maybe if she would have stayed in Budapest—maybe my parents would have crossed the border with my two older brothers, and not have to wait for the fate they had now, the fear the lived in. It was sure a beautiful city, or maybe it was just that this was the first big city I had even seen. The buildings; they used to really clean the streets every morning. The clickety—clack of the horses that would deliver milk. I couldn't understand that the milk was delivered to the door—even on the third floor to Dr. Rosenock. I would be up at five o'clock just to look out the window, just to observe all these things.

Mrs. Rosenock used to tell me that it was a shame that I was cut off like this because of the war, because I was so alert and so bright. It didn't really mean anything to me. I didn't consider it a compliment or that I was something special. I just said politely, "Thank you." But she observed me pretty good, she watched me pretty good, every move.

Later on I met Dr. Rosenock's sister, who was there too. She'd been away; she went to visit somebody before I arrived. She came from Brackislav in Slovakia—that's where they were from originally, except he went to an American school in Budapest. She said that she didn't know where two of her sons were, but one managed to get to London, England, and he was in the Czech army now. And she was a sweet lady, just like her brother. She felt very sorry for me, and she always used to come out after dinner and talk to me in Czechoslovakian, and I think Mrs. Rosenock resented that—that she kept me from doing my work. But I tried to be very fast, so I could talk to this sweet lady who gave me just a few reasons to live.

And once I asked her if she would come with me for a walk, that I would like to see the city, the city was so beautiful. She said, "You're right, the city is so beautiful." She herself was quite afraid to walk on the street. I don't know what kind of papers she had, but she didn't know Hungarian much better than I did.

Well, soon enough, when I went to buy some food—the market on the street, a farm's market—I ran away. And I know I wasn't far from where my girlfriend Rosie lived, and I figured I was just gonna observe the building—maybe I would be lucky, maybe she had gone shopping too, maybe

she was shaking out the rugs. But the first time I didn't see anybody, and the door was shut. She had written to me that on the first floor there was a big, beautiful balcony. I said, "I'm gonna walk around that balcony 'til I see her." And I also remembered Dr. Rosenock had warned me that this Jewish dentist she worked for was also a Jew hater. Or maybe he hated himself and other Jews because he was paralyzed from the waist down. So I kept that in mind and never wanted to go into that building, but I hoped I would see her—I hoped I would see Rosie once, and then she would know that I was in Budapest too.

Once when I came home a little late I got a good yelling—at from the doctor's wife: "Where in the world were you? We worried about you. You can't do that. We worried about you. We know how long it takes to shop, how long it takes to come back. We thought somebody grabbed you already." I said, "Well, so far I haven't seen any Nazis, with their helmets, with their bayonets, like I used to see in Jasina." She said, "Yeah, they walk around in civilian clothes. They cannot walk around in their uniforms, not the German Nazis anyway"—the Hungarian Nazis did.

"I haven't seen them either."

As long as the King, the Hungarian King, was alive we might be just spared, she told me. "But please don't do it anymore; don't go. One of these days when I have time I'm going to walk over to that dental office—so—called dental office—and I'm gonna alert your girlfriend that you're here. I'll slip her a little note, or I might tell her."

Well, it took quite a few weeks, and the doctor's wife didn't say anything, and I didn't say anything either. But I went

to the market, and as I went to buy fish I saw somebody standing near the fish stand who looked just like my girlfriend Rosie. She was very pale and very skinny, and I looked a million times from the side to see if it was her. Then I just sort of went in front of here, and as she spotted me she kept looking—she had big black eyes. She kept looking at me and I kept looking at her. Then she started to wink at me, and I winked back. And she walked away from the market a little bit, and she sat down on a bench. It was a beautiful street, a tree—lined street. She sat down on a bench, and I followed her and sat down next to her. And I said to her in Yiddish, "My God, I've been looking for you for two months, and I finally found you. I was warned by these people—this family that I live with—that I shouldn't go to see you." She said, "You did the right thing, because I have a lot of problems with my employers. You did the right thing. Now you just give me your address, where you're staying, and let's part, because you gonna get hell, and I'm gonna get hell for being late." I said, "Not me. I'm treated like one of their own, so far, but anyway I have to get back because they worry about me." So we parted and kissed and cried, but we didn't ask each other any questions.

It took maybe ten days before I heard a knock one evening on the door, and I went to open it, and when I saw her, we collapsed into each others arms and cried. We cried for an hour. And again I said to myself, "How can I cry?" I hadn't cried in years. The first time I cried when I was talking to the doctor, and I was telling him the stories about what happened in Jasina and across the border in Poland. And now I was crying again.

"Okay," she said, "let's sit down and let's talk a little bit. I don't have much time. I don't have much time. I work seven days a week, but I took off an hour just to see you a minute. Let's talk a little bit. Did you see my parents lately?" "Well," I said, "it's been a long time since I was in Jasina, and even before I left I didn't see them." She said she didn't have any mail from them, she didn't know what to say. I said, "I didn't get any mail either yet, except that my father sent this document with somebody. And I don't know who the somebody was. They handed the doctor's wife the document and they disappeared. So I have no idea; I didn't get any mail anyway."

"Do they know that you're here, that you're alive?"

I said, "Yeah, I hope so, I hope so—probably, because they sent my papers." And then she said she would see me soon again. And she left.

I felt great that evening after seeing my friend. It was again a little bit of comfort to me, and Mrs. Rosenock recognized the expression on my face, and she said, "I know who visited you—your friend. You look very good, you look happy." "Well, I don't feel exactly happy," I replied, "but I feel I have somebody to talk to. Even if I cannot go to her building, I hope she will come here."

But we made it so that every time she went shopping, the doctor's wife sent me. Even if she just had to send me for a few potatoes, or a few onions, so I could meet my friend and talk to her. That was very kind of them. What I realized though, was that she wasn't very kind to her sister-in-law, and that woman really struggled.

It was a big apartment, with big rooms, and she slept in the dining room because the doctor's office was in the same

apartment. And many times she complained to me that she knew she was not welcome; where could she go? It was so terrible. She used to read to me the German newspapers, and she would explain to me what was going on. I would tell her, "It looks like Budapest is an isolated city. Things aren't that bad yet here." She said, "You don't know how bad things are. They gathered here Jews like me." She didn't have Hungarian citizenship; she was from Brackislav, which was in Czechoslovakia. She had to be very careful where she walked on the street, and that was why she felt like she was jammed in. And she just hoped that she would be able to go to England to be where her son was. He had just volunteered in the Czechoslovakian army.

Beside this lady—sometimes I would call her Aunt Helen—I was lucky enough to run into two girls, two sisters: the most beautiful girls I have ever seen. I thought they must be very rich girls, from the way they looked and the way they were dressed. And I didn't dare to talk to them; after all, I was only a little maid, and I wasn't supposed to tell anybody that I was Jewish. But anyway, as I was waving the rugs—waving the rugs means there were no vacuum cleaners, not even in modern Budapest, but we used to beat the rugs so the dust should get out. And the girls beat their rugs. They came up. They were living on the second floor, and they started to talk to me and I talked to them. And they had these big Magen Davids on their chests. And once they invited me down, and I didn't know if I was able to go down, and I asked Mrs. Rosenock if I may go down, that the girls called me. And she said, "Yes, but I'm not sure that you should tell them. Better tell them that you are just

a peasant girl from the country and that you work for us. Don't tell 'em you're Jewish because you never know who they will tell."

They never asked me. The girls were very glad to see me, and they lived in a very small apartment. It was like one large room. In half of the large room there was a kitchen in a corner. So not everybody had big apartments in that building. In the other corner their father worked—he was a shoemaker—fixing shoes. And there was one bedroom that the girls shared, and their parents slept on a couch in the living room. So the living room was a living room, a shoemaker's shop, and a kitchen. But it was sparkling clean, and it had the smell of a home. So I met these two girls, and since I was young and I needed some company, I felt very good with them. So between the two girls and my friend Rosie, I felt like a human being again—but just during the day. At night my mind, my body, my soul were home, back in Jasina.

From the first pay I got—it wasn't much—I went and I bought my mother a pair of shoes. I remember how badly swollen her legs were because she didn't have the proper shoes. I bought her a pair of shoes, and I sent them through the mail, and when they got the package they couldn't believe it: that from my first pay I sent my mother a pair of shoes. They were like high shoes, almost like boots. Unfortunately they didn't fit, and they sent them back, and I exchanged them. My face got so red—I thought it was a crime to buy something and then exchange it. But the people in the store were pretty nice, and they exchanged them for a bigger size. And I think the big size was because my mother had swollen feet again, and she couldn't get in her normal

size. I mailed them, and she still got the shoes and was very grateful to me because now she felt a little bit better.

They didn't write me too many details from home, but it was hard, it was a very hard summer. My sister Shandeleh who used to help me plant the vegetables, she worked with my brothers and my mother helped. But they just couldn't do as much as when I was home. Or maybe they just got to be very indifferent. I used to write to them under my new name—Ilana Kovatch—and they knew who I was. And soon, I promised them, I was gonna try to bring to Budapest my two younger brothers if I could find work for them. And I also asked Shandeleh to come, but she was so in love that she didn't come, or maybe because Berl wouldn't go. Then I finally succeeded. The cousin of the doctor came for dinner, and he was an electrician. And I talked to him, I asked him if he would take one of my brothers to be an apprentice, so that he should come to Budapest. I wrote home that he said he would, but where would my brother live? The electrician didn't have a place for him to live, and in the doctor's apartment no more people could live. But then he said, "Well, let him come and then we'll see what he can do."

Well, when I wrote that letter there was a lot of happiness. And they decided that my younger brother Samuel should come, because my older brother worked at that time in a mill and helped out a little bit at home with the money. So when my younger brother came I was happy. I couldn't...I couldn't talk when I saw him. I was like a deaf mute. And he...he tried to rub my back to see if I was alive, and after a few hours I was able to talk to him. And I made him a good

meal—with the doctor's wife's approval of course—and then I took him over to Dr. Rosenock's cousin who had this electrical shop.

It wasn't much of an electrician's shop; it was small. Then I just realized that not everybody had so many rooms like Dr. Rosenock. Because this electrician had three rooms: one was a bedroom, one was a combination kitchen and living room, and one was his shop. And that's where my brother worked and slept. I felt horrible about how he slept, and I also felt horrible about how he ate. And I didn't dare talk to anybody. I just didn't send any more money home because I had to buy my little brother clothes. Because we couldn't afford any new clothes we went to this...like an open market where they used to sell used clothing, and I bought him pants and shoes. And sometimes I would steal into the basement and wash out his clothes, but it wasn't welcomed by Mrs. Rosenock. She said to me once, "Enough is enough, and I think you should stop it. Teach your brother to wash his own clothes." I think Dr. Rosenock overheard that, and he told me that they were trying to buy a building where they would place all these apprentices. Not only my brother—but all these apprentices: to give them just a decent bath and a hot meal, at least once or twice a day, because there were many Jewish boys like that in Budapest who had nowhere to sleep. Some of them even slept on the steps.

And my brother would come every Sunday when the shop was closed, and I used to say to Mrs. Rosenock that I didn't want to eat my dinner, I wanted to keep it for my brother. But she was kind. She said, "You just eat and we find for your brother a meal too." And she did.

So every Sunday I felt warm again, I felt good again seeing my brother—even if he looked so bad, and at times he was so dirty that my heart was aching. Then, by the end of the summer of '42, the doctor told me that they had bought a building...

I was a really efficient maid because the doctor's wife always complimented me. In fact, she even mentioned a few times: "The man who will get you will be a very lucky man." Well, that was the last thing on my mind—man schman; all that was on my mind was how to send my parents a few pennies to help them pull through the war—how stupid! I didn't know that someone, somewhere, was planning their end.

So, soon enough, Margaret came back from her vacation, and she was a little bit surprised that I was still there and that my Hungarian language had improved so much. Of course she just spoke Hungarian, and I already spoke a few languages by that time. And she didn't see me any more as a threat to her well—being there because the doctor's son-in-law came back, and I was already there half the time to make his breakfast. Make his breakfast! It was unbelievable how much he yelled from the first day: "My soft—boiled egg is too hard, my soft—boiled egg is too soft; my toast is too brown, my toast..." Every day it was something. What a cranky, big-bellied guy he was; I saw it the minute I met him, because the greeting went like this: "Oh—another Communist, another one from Czechoslovakian President Benesh. Well, you are all Communists, including your president—that's why you have the problems now." And I honest to goodness didn't know what a Communist was, and I asked him: "What is a Communist?" He giggled, and his fat

belly was shaking, but he didn't answer. He gave me that stupid look. And the doctor called me aside the next day and said, "Look, my child, I know what you mean, and I know how you feel. But it would be better for you if you don't answer him, or anybody else for that matter. It's hard at your age, with your rage at the world, to suppress what you have to say, but you just have to do it." I promised him. I said, "Okay, I will never say a word, regardless of who says what." He said, "That's the way you will make it through the war."

So in a few weeks his daughter came back, and her two children, from their vacation, and I went full time to their household. I was sleeping there, and I used to do like the cooking and just light cleaning. They had a woman who would do the laundry and who would do the heavy cleaning. But the work didn't bother me; I didn't care. The busier I was, the better off I was, because whenever I had a minute's time—and that wasn't too often—my mind wandered, my brain shook. I had to run out. This thing, this little bit they understood, that usually maids weren't allowed to go out except Sunday afternoons, but they realized my restlessness, my worries. And maybe the doctor told them they should ease up on me. And every afternoon after I finished the dinner dishes—dinner was at one o'clock there, midday—they let me run out. At that time my papers were A—Number—One Christian, and every day I would visit my girlfriend Rosie, just for a short while, just to see her; she smelled a little bit from home. And we would have a small chat, but she was not able to get out—only Sunday afternoons. So I was a privileged little maid. My God, I was able to run out a little

bit. Of course my work had to be ready. Knowing that I could get out if I sped it up double-time.

The doctor's daughter was really a nice woman. She was a pleasant woman, but she had that aristocratic—I don't know—maybe upbringing, or maybe it was because her husband was a big lawyer that she thought she was superior, she was above, she was above everybody. I didn't care about that but—but I observe people very closely, very closely. Maybe because of my experience or maybe because of my curiosity I observe them very closely: what they say, and what they do. And I just sort of used to think to myself many times—I didn't write it down at that time, didn't want anything written down. But the girl was about ten at that time, maybe twelve, and her brother was fifteen—just a little bit younger than me—and they would go to school. The boy was very bright; he played music. He was good at school, he was a real sportsman—a real bright boy—and broad—minded: surprise of all surprises, which probably his grandfather had a lot to do with. Their name was Behrend. Of course they changed it—I forgot already, Birnbaum it was, or whatever—they changed it because of his position. In Hungary it was very difficult for a Jew to rise to a high position. They had to be World War I heroes like this lawyer claimed he was. He told me that nothing could ever happen to him because of his medals from the First World War. It was just the Czechoslovakian Jews who are so dumb that they didn't feel much loyalty to the motherland Hungary. He did, and that's why he was where he was, and they would never have anything against him. And being what I was, I said, "My God, I hope you're right. My God, I hope you're right." I repeated it five times. And then

he put his fingers to his brain and sort of twisted it like, "Boy, is she a stupid idiot. She really doesn't know what she is talking about." Once he even said it to me, but again I realized that it's not such a different world after all. Perhaps it was just that circle that I was in, or was lucky to be in for the time being, anyway.

Chapter Seven

SO I WENT TO VISIT my friend. I always took different routes to go there or get back. I suddenly discovered that there was a ghetto, which nobody told me about, that there was a ghetto in Budapest. A very dark section, very dark section. Once when I ran back home, because I was a little bit late and I had to prepare dinner, I just looked in. It was at that time when people were able to go in and out; I think it was like between two and four that they let the people in. The miseries were unbelievable. But the miseries weren't much different than those that I saw in Jasina when they dragged the people, some Jewish people, to Poland to be killed. They were poor and old and torn, and that night I could not sleep; I could not even eat. Of course my employer thought that I was already in love with some kind of corner cop on the street. If there was ever an arrogant man, that was an arrogant Jew—well—Jew; at least he didn't deny it. He just thought that he was a privileged Jew, with all his medals.

Soon enough I had a chance, when we went back for dinner to Dr. Rosenock's—this was his daughter that I was employed by—I looked for the chance to talk. Either to Dr. Rosenock's sister or to him. And just ask him—talk to him a

little bit—about how long the ghetto was there and who were the people in it? But that evening there were too many people there, and I didn't have a chance. Besides, there was a little bit of a scandal there; there was an uninvited guest.

The uninvited guest happened to be one of Mr. Behrend's cousins. He claimed to be a writer. And I didn't know what was going on there—there was a harsh discussion—but I found out from Margaret, Dr. Rosenock's maid, what happened. That he was a writer and he had to write the truth; he had to write the truth about the Jews. He was a converted Jew. He had to write the truth, explaining the reason why the Nazis hated them. Well, some of them were hated because they wore beards; some of them were hated because the Czechoslovakians were Communists; some of them were hated...of course in Budapest nothing like this could ever happen. Some of them were hated because they constantly tried to be different: like they didn't go to church. Why not? Then, of course, what I overheard...just then I didn't hear his little discussion, but I overheard quite loud and clear what Dr. Rosenock said to him, "Do you know the person who you are praying to?"

"Oh no. He is not a person. He is the almighty God, Jesus Christ."

"Yeah—your almighty God was a Jew and died a Jew."

And that's when the terrible argument started and it went on for a long time. I really hated to see Dr. Rosenock being so aggravated, and I knew it must be very serious. But we left, and I didn't have a chance to talk to anybody about the ghetto. I couldn't ask my girlfriend Rosie because she tried to avoid the discussion.

Anyway, once I passed by and I found out that the people could go out, but I wasn't sure if they let anybody go in between two and four. So I asked Mrs. Behrend if I could leave a little bit early—usually I would leave like at three and come back at four—thirty. She said, "Yes," and I set out at one o'clock, and I circled that ghetto because you couldn't see much. But then, when the people walked out, I tried to get in. Of course I wasn't allowed to, they looked at my papers and luckily they couldn't read what it said on it—my bicycle permit converted into Ilana Kovatch—so I wasn't let in. But I was outside and I saw a little bit of the people walking away and I tried to talk to them. But they didn't trust me and they didn't answer me because my accent was probably something that scared them. Then when one bearded guy came out, an older man, I tried to talk to him in Yiddish, and he was delighted. He said to me, "My child, not now, not now. I have to run and get my ration of bread. Come back the day after tomorrow and I will talk to you. I try not to have any errands for my wife. I will talk to you."

Well, I looked for that day after tomorrow like somebody's looking to win the world championship—or how can I compare it? But as luck had it, my employer found something for me to do. He had some invited guest from the Parliament—I'm not sure if he was a lawyer for the Parliament—he had some big position, and he had his own office at that time; still, maybe because of his medals...my employer said that I should serve them afternoon tea—that day—when I was supposed to meet my bearded brother, my bearded brother Jew in the ghetto. Well, my hands were shaking, but I didn't say anything because by that time I had

gotten to know his character: he was a "superior being." Of course nothing could ever happen to him because he was a patriotic Hungarian. I said to myself, "I hope you are right and I'm wrong." But I was also warned never to mention Czechoslovakia, never to mention anything—just politely smile and curtsy and serve the tea in a white apron with a white bonnet, and just walk out of the dining room. So I did just what they told me.

The discussion was most businesslike, at least that which I really overheard. And the people never stopped staring at me, which made me quite nervous: Why did they stare at me? Did they see that I came from another world? Or why did they stare at me? Well, I really don't know, I really don't know why.

It really felt great when I was finally able to speak to my new friend in the ghetto. This unhappy man told me that he—he called me "my child"—he told me that he had two daughters about my age and a little younger left in Poland, and he didn't know what had happened to them. When I asked him who the people in the ghetto were, he said they were mostly the people who had run away from Poland, and some of them that the Nazis labeled the unwelcome people, like the people from the Czechoslovakian part—but for some reason they didn't manage to ship them to Poland the summer before. And most of them ran away—Polish Jews. Then he suddenly took off and didn't even want to look at me because the guard was about to close the gate. The guard was about to close the gate on the Jew—My God, I just can't believe it; it's just something that gives me goose pimples—and madness.

Well, I didn't go there for the next few days because I just

couldn't—I just couldn't get there. Later on—it was about the end of 1942—my employer and his wife got ready to throw a big Christmas party. I guess they celebrated Christmas.

So the big attorney with all his medals was jolly. He was whistling and hopping and he told me how many people he had invited. But he said, "We not gonna give them meat. We gonna make some fish because they don't deserve to have meat for dinner." One thing I asked him, if his famous cousin, the writer, if he would be there. He said, "Of course he will be there. He's the fun of the party. Don't you like him?" I said, "Why should I like him? He's a Jew—hater!" He writes in his novels that some Jews are hated because they wear beards; others are hated because they look different; others are hated because they don't celebrate Sunday, they celebrate Saturday; and a lot of them are hated because they don't believe in Jesus Christ. They believe Jesus Christ was a man and not a God."

Oh, he giggled. His jolly belly was shaking; he giggled. He said, "You are a real Communist. All these things you pick up on so fast. But are you a spy? Usually spies also pick up on little things." I didn't answer because I knew I wouldn't get anywhere. I remembered Dr. Rosenock had told me, "Don't answer." I talked too much as it was.

The next day his wife came and started measuring out the flour for a cake. Everything was locked, locked under two locks—with such a gate. It was like a little closet off of the kitchen. And that gate she went in, then she opened it again, and sometimes she would pull out food that she would never look at. Like chocolate, chocolate for making chocolate milk. And when she went to use that in the cake, I looked and saw

that it was full of worms. She couldn't believe it. And she begged me not to tell her husband, because he claimed that she was not a good housekeeper, and that she was not raised right and all. I said to her—again my tongue went loose—"I'm not surprised about his saying that." And she said, "WHAT?! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Remember you are just a little maid. You have to keep your mouth shut."

So she told me that if I didn't tell her husband about the worms in the chocolate, she wouldn't tell that I laughed at him. I ignored her; I didn't answer. I really didn't have patience for these little things. And again and again I compared the two worlds. The world in Czechoslovakia, where there was fear, where there was rationing of bread, where there was death—murder—all against the Jews and on the Jews. And here in this big city, the Jews still worried how to lock up some food, or how not to tell some minor things. All this my mind had a hard time accepting. Then the measuring of the food. My God, the measuring of the food, including salt. And I asked her if she always did that, or just because it was war now. She said yeah, she always did that. She was trained in a special school not to leave any food out. So she didn't leave any food out—but what she had to throw out then: the nuts had become full of worms over the summer; the chocolate was full of worms. And I shouldn't tell her husband—but she didn't call him husband, she called him "Eeved Oor." "Eeved" means lawyer; "Oor" means his highness. Like you would say in English "Esquire Sir," that's how she called her husband, and she suggested to me that I should call him like that too. I didn't answer that too, but I kept nicely calling "Mr. Behrend."

Well, I realized that he was the problem because he was the superior being: he's better than all the other Jews, he has medals, he's a rewarded Hungarian citizen, nothing can happen to him. And when he mentioned that again, he mentioned that the Czechoslovakian Jews suffer because they're Communists, because their president was a Communist. I asked him, "Can you please tell me what is a Communist?" Well, he roared laughing, he roared laughing: "How stupid that peasant is! She really doesn't know what a Communist is." Well, his son Gary overheard it and he came over to me. He said, "You really don't know what a Communist is?" And that was the honest truth. I really didn't know. But over the years I was in Budapest I should have known that it was always suggested that every Jew who the Hungarians didn't like—he was a Communist, or supposedly so.

Well, I asked Gary if he had a book about it. He said, "A book about it! Communism! Are you crazy? You couldn't find one anywhere. Besides, you don't even know Hungarian." I said, "I will try, I will try to understand."

"Oh no. If they find one anywhere they will hang us. Besides who wants to have a book like that? We just have patriotic books."

There were books even his grandfather had to hide—they were non-kosher. Well, when the party came around they again reminded me that I cannot talk, and I cannot say where I am from, and I cannot say I'm Jewish. Of course I could not; I knew that. And I shouldn't get into discussions because some of them were from the Parliament, some of them were other government employees. They would be singing and dancing, and I should just say that I was from a small town,

because they would say, "Well, she looks like a small-town peasant," so it wouldn't be so hard. "She looks like a typical peasant, with her nose turned up, with her hair, and with her sad eyes, she definitely looks like a small-town peasant; we have nothing to be afraid of."

So when the night of the party arrived, my duty was to hang up their coats, to curtsy to them—which I really didn't want to do, and I didn't do it. Sometimes I was so stubborn I just felt like fighting, even fighting in my own stupid little ways. And the people didn't mind much. So I was kept very busy serving the food, or catering to the people. They hired a special cook to cook the food, after Mrs. Behrend measured it and some of it she had to throw out. And the people, what they talked about—it was just unbelievable; it was just unbelievable. They gave the rundown exactly: how many Jews were killed in Poland, how many Jews were killed here. And I couldn't believe it, I couldn't believe my ears. I mean, here the parents were Jewish too. His father-in-law was a very good religious Jew. Was he selling his skin? Was he sitting and listening to how many Jewish animals were killed, and how the German Fascists had an office in Budapest? They gave instructions to the Hungarian Fascists: how, what to do; how to gather the Jews. And then a slight mention about the ghetto; they were talking about people from the ghetto, the Polish. Or were they planning to take them out. It wasn't that good to understand. They were planning to take them out, to ship them back to Poland. Or they were gonna take them out to ship them to work somewhere, those that can work. And they laughed and giggled and drank.

How many worlds can one city have? There was the

ghetto starving in fear, with sad hearts and fear of what would happen and what had happened to their families. And there was me—the peasant—looking little maid, with the big Jewish heart, with a lot of worry about her parents, her sisters and brothers. In comparing—I never stopped comparing lives, I never stopped comparing.

Of course from time to time my fantasies were disrupted when some of the men pinched me. They pinched my backside, and laughed, and their wives—as much as they didn't like it—they laughed with them. You see, in a society like that of the Hungarians you have to constantly please your husband—even if he pinches a peasant maid you have to laugh. Otherwise people think there is something suspicious about you.

And that happened even in the Behrend household. My boss came home with lipstick smeared on his shirt, and there was a big fight, a very big fight, a lot of fighting—I don't know the details—but he reminded her that he was the "Eeved Oor", and that she should stay in her place.

Well, that evening, that was just immediately after New Year's, 1943, that evening she didn't stay in her place. I saw a shadow walking by—it was very early morning, January 1st, after a New Year's Eve party—in some kind of a white fur coat, but she bent, she bent when she walked by the kitchen so I shouldn't see her. Later on I found out why she bent. Every time she would put on her white mink she would bend down in the window so I shouldn't see her. She also bent down from other neighbors—bent down so they shouldn't see her. What the hell? If somebody has an "Eeved Oor," an "Esquire Sir," a white mink coat is natural to have, but for some reason she hid it.

My God, between that Christmas and New Year's so much went on—the parties, the parades, the fun. I just couldn't understand how constantly I had to fight with myself, just like I was one person in two or three worlds. It's very hard to understand. Sometimes I wished I should be back home, just to sit even in a cold room with my family. And just to eat that piece of potato slice, because my family had feelings, knew what humanity is. They knew always how to help others, and here it was so self-centered, so self-centered. Of course the Behrends' happiness didn't last much longer, and I wish I had been wrong when I predicted it—because once in my madness and indifference I told him that his medals would not protect him. Then he became furious, and he told his wife she should send me back to the Rosenocks, to her father. He didn't want to see me; I was a fresh, arrogant Jew.

Well, I don't know what happened, but I still stayed a while, I still stayed a while. Thank God they couldn't replace me, especially for so cheap, but I heard later that they paid me half of what they paid other people.

So everybody was busy celebrating between Christmas and New Year's '43. And I didn't have any mail from my parents for a long time, and it quite worried me. My brother came in—at Christmas—and told me a few things that he had overheard from his friends: that they were deporting Jews again to Poland, and that we should try to get in touch with our parents. But how could we get in touch? There was no telephone, and the mail didn't go. So it was quite a sad situation.

During the holidays it gave me an opportunity to go into the ghetto again. When I went by I didn't see anybody and the gate was closed because the stores weren't open on

Christmas Day, so they didn't let the people out. But I circled around anyway, sort of felt like I was home there—more than where I was living right then. So I just hoped that after New Year's they would open the gate and I could again talk to this guy I'd met.

In the meantime, on New Year's Day my employer's family went to his in-laws, Dr. Rosenock's. And I looked forward to that very much because there I found a little bit more friendly atmosphere, or a little bit more enlightened. They knew what was going on more, or they wanted to know what was going on more everywhere in regard to the Jews. I hoped I could talk a little bit to the doctor's sister just for my own well-being, but mainly I wanted to talk to the doctor. I wanted to talk to him about the ghetto.

So when I was in the kitchen helping out Margaret, the doctor came in and he called me into the office. First he asked me why I hadn't kept my promise just not to say anything to his son-in-law. I said I really didn't say nothing, it was just that sometimes it jumped out of my mouth; I didn't mean anything. He said, "It will be better if you don't answer him because he's going to provoke you. He really thinks that the Czechoslovakian Jews are all Communists—all that you know—I don't have to repeat it."

So that was that. I really saw a friend in him, and I promised him that. Then I told that I met this guy—he was from Poland and he was in the ghetto, and how torn up he was; and if I could somewhere get some clothes to take to him in the ghetto. He said that he was going to look around, and he promised by next week when I came—he just asked me the size—he would have a nice package for him. But I

shouldn't take it in a package; I should sort of take it in one piece at a time when I go, and just be very careful. Just be very careful because the guards were very cruel. He had a little bit more of an idea of what was going on there. He asked me to ask my friends if they needed any drugs, because he would be able to give them some—aspirins and other minor things.

So all the week between Christmas and New Year's the ghetto was closed because the Christians were too busy celebrating, and there was no place to let a ghetto—torn Jew out—even if they needed food or something. And everybody was drunk. Walking on the streets and seeing everyone in celebration I was wondering what kind of religion they observed. I mean, a religion isn't all drinking. But everybody was drunk, and I would walk the streets, but it was a very sad calm, and a very sad quietness. I didn't see many yellow stars in that week—yellow stars meant that they were Jews. They were supposed to wear yellow stars there—on the left side of the chest.

So I used to go home, and once I went in to clean up the library and I looked for some books, and the books I saw were not too interesting. They were mostly law books and Hungarian history—they were not very interesting to me, but I still looked at them. And then Mr. Behrend, my employer, found me in the library. He didn't say a word, he was just standing near the door and staring. His face—his facial expression changed, and then he told me that he realized just then that I was not a real peasant. Because he never saw any of his employees—kitchen employees—look in the library. They weren't interested. Many times he had to fight with

them; they should clean the books. But I cleaned the books more than any other place, even just to get a glimpse of pictures.

Then he walked out and didn't say anything, and I was glad because it gave me a chance to escape, even with pictures, even—even a little bit to escape into another world. I didn't like this world. I didn't like the fancy parties and the so-called academics. I knew they hated Jews and they could hardly wait—I saw in everybody what I used to see in Czechoslovakia, in Jasina, that they could hardly wait for the time they would be able to rob and kill freely. Or round the Jews up in the ghetto. But the escape into the ghetto was when I felt very good.

After New Year's of '43, the ghetto opened. And I took in the first time a pair of pants. My little friend, he waited for me outside. My little friend I shall call Max. I really didn't know his real name, and he didn't want to tell me. He waited sort of—not waited, but walked outside and his pants were quite torn. And when I showed him what I had—I sort of just wrapped them around my hand—he just started to cry. He said, "You taking your life in your hands when you come here, and look what I got? Something to wear." Then I pulled out of my coat pocket a pair of socks, warm socks, and he said, "My God, where did you get these treasures?" I said to him, "There is a very good person in this city, a very good person who knows what's going on, who's not like the others who pretend they don't know what's going on." He said, "Nobody knows what's going on inside. Inside we have the same Ukrainian guards that we had in Poland. Nobody's supposed to know, but we get beaten up and tortured, and

even our measly daily rations are taken away by these Ukrainian guards."

"But how do they get here?"

He said, "They came—some of the came with the Polish army, and some of them just here for a final war to help the Nazi Reich out." So I told him that I still had another pair of pants and two sweaters that I was going to bring to him. And he said to me that he was working in a first—aid room in the ghetto, and there were a lot of sick people without medication, which is what Dr. Rosenock has asked me to find out. And I asked him what kind of medication. He said, "I'm not a doctor, but anything that heals a wound, or anything that just gives a little bit of relief will do. There are not doctors inside because they took them away to concentration camps. But anything we can do—sometimes even just plain water we rub over a wound and try to heal it that way."

So on the walk out, on the way out from the ghetto I felt a little bit better, but it wasn't for long. The guard stopped, and the guard asked me—by that time my Hungarian was pretty fluent—"Where is your star? Where is your yellow star?" Because when the Jews walked out of the ghetto for the two hours between two and four they were supposed to wear the yellow star. I didn't answer him. I just walked by and he didn't say anything. I really didn't care what he would say—I really didn't care; my thoughts were very far away.

Walking home very slowly, I saw two young men being dragged and beaten on the streets: "You dirty Jew, you dirty Jew." And I said, "If my employer claims he has so much power, why doesn't he do something about this? He just looks away." I couldn't look away, so I just walked sort of

back and forth in circles. Then I saw some real Nazis—some real Nazis means the black uniforms with their Nazi hats. And that again brought bad memories. I looked them straight in the eyes—as to not to acknowledge their power. I looked them straight in the eyes and one was awfully familiar, but I walked by and I went home to prepare dinner.

It was about the third or fourth of January, 1943. I happened to find a newspaper on the street. I just couldn't afford a newspaper or I wasn't interested. And I was surprised to see there were four newspapers attacking Jews, but my employer claimed that there were these Jews that would never be hurt—it was only for the others. "He must be blind not to see this, he must be blind."

So I brought the newspaper home. I spread it out on the kitchen table to make sure that when either of them came in they would see it. Well, when they saw the newspaper—I don't know if they were surprised—but they told me not to ever pick up this newspaper on the street because it was a Communist paper. I said, "How can it be a Communist paper? It's written in Hungarian. I don't know how to read it." He said, "Yes, it's written in Hungarian, but it's an underworld Communist paper." (Again Communist!) "So that means that the underground Communist paper attacks the Jews too," I said. He didn't answer me and I didn't say anything more.

The paper was taken away and thrown in the trash, but the picture remained in my mind all the same. From the other people in the building I soon found out that in that building not a single Jew lived. That was a government building where there were high officers. It was a very prestigious

building. I found it out from the janitor. I used to talk to her all the time, simply because I was lonely and because I found out so much from her. Employees of these big shots loved to talk; we loved to talk about our masters.

So this woman wife was of course the janitor over the whole building, and she knew a lot of secrets. So she was telling me, "Yeah, Jews don't live there. They're not supposed to. But there is one converted Jew," and she didn't tell me his name, "but I know. I'm older than him. I know when he moved in here. Both of them are converted and their son doesn't even know that he's Jewish." "Well," I said, "how many sons do they have?" She said to me, "One. He's quite young. He's a teenager now, but they never told him."

From her I found out a lot, I mean from the way she would talk. Once she had a party and she brought in other servants from the building. They were all talking that the Jews were killed because they were rich. They were all so rich and powerful, so...

From other people in the building I also heard that it was a government building. "Thanks to God no Jews live here;" that's what they used to say, because all the Jews were very rich and very powerful. And that's why the Germans killed them, so they could take everything away from them. These people were just repeating what they heard. Thank God that they didn't know how to read and write.

So, there I found out that all Jews are rich. Up to now they used to tell me that all Jews were Communists, or they were hated because they practiced their unbelievably stupid religion, and because they wore beards. Now it was because they are all rich and powerful, so they have to be cut down.

My God, I just wish Jewish people should be so powerful. Unfortunately, from what I see, they're powerless and the world ignores them. Like Dr. Rosenock told me, "All the doors are closed for us—all. We can't go nowhere. That's why you should be very careful, my child. Maybe, just maybe, you will make it. And we need you, you young people."

Once I asked him if he was telling the same thing to his grandson and his granddaughter. I noticed the granddaughter didn't have much upstairs. But he said, "No, we couldn't, because it would go against my son-in-law's wish, to alert the children that they were really Jewish. But if things come to it, then every Jew's the same: be he Communist, be he Fascist, be he Zionist— a Jew is a Jew is a Jew." That little man, that little, wonderful doctor was telling me that, and I found out through the war and after that it's so very true.

So, I made many trips to the ghetto, and I took in sulphur pills, bandages—thanks to the doctor, thanks to him. Bandages, aspirins, and a little iodine here and there, all of which were scarce. He didn't get his ration, he didn't get his tools—medicine and all—anymore because he was a known Jew. Yet in the hospital they needed him, and they constantly called him. Later on he told me that he was working for a Jewish first—aid room where the sick Jews were brought in. And I asked him if there were any patients from the ghetto. He said, "No," and he was very anxious that I tell him all about the ghetto. I said the time is so short, the two hours, they all go out to buy something, or just go out for a little bit of air; that when I come in there aren't too many people inside. And outside they're really afraid to talk to me because I don't wear the star like they do, yet I would love

to. He said, "I know how you feel, but don't do it. You made it up 'til now, and you will make it." And he encouraged me a lot.

Of course I didn't take all the medicines at once. I just used to pack my pockets very thinly and give a few pieces every day. I couldn't even go every day many times.

So I made it my business almost every second day to go into the ghetto, and to take the medicine. And Dr. Rosenock saw to it that I would have what to take. Sometimes it was just cotton balls and alcohol, sometimes it was just iodine or some bandages—mostly it was aspirins. He didn't have much because of the rationing of the medicines. I'm not sure if it was the same for all Jewish doctors—or for all doctors—or just Dr. Rosenock. I really don't know, but things started to get really, really bad.

Chapter 8

IN THE GHETTO about March 1943 was the first time that I saw skeletons. I saw skeletons just plain lying on the street. For what purpose I don't know. Well, I stopped—I stopped to look. Or I just stopped because I couldn't walk further. Somebody slapped me over my head with a bayonet, and it was sure a Nazi. He slapped me. He yelled, "Get lost!" So I took off, but I wobbled and I was really dizzy. And instead of going home I went to the doctor, and he was home, and he was really upset. I'm sure he knew more than I did, and we talked, and talked, and talked. And he just told me to talk because it made me feel better. At that time he said that I might have to switch back to his household because his son-in-law didn't really think I should be there; he was suspicious. "Even if everybody else thinks that you're just a Hungarian peasant." And I didn't say anything; I was very indifferent. And he asked me if I had any letters from my parents, and I said not lately. And it was really a sad...sad, sad day. Just unbelievable to describe.

And when I was walking home it was quite dark already, and some of these SOB Nazis approached me. Some offered me chocolate, some offered me dates—when would I be free

for a date and all. And for what reason, I don't know, but I used to carry a yellow star in my pocket—I just felt better. When one wouldn't let me through—saying that I should take his chocolate, or that I should start kissing him in the middle of the street—I took out the yellow star and showed it to him. And he just started to giggle. I thought he was gonna take the gun or whatever or kick me. He started to giggle. He said, "So you too! Which Jew did you kill that you ripped off the yellow star? Are you going to keep that for a souvenir, that you can go to the rich Americans and sell it to them? I have quite a few souvenirs, quite a few souvenirs, including gold, diamonds, dollars. You know what? I even have gold Jewish teeth. I'm gonna take them home, I'm gonna sell them. Some of them I'm gonna keep for souvenirs," he told me. Well, maybe I hadn't been paralyzed enough that day with seeing Jewish skeletons in the ghetto; now I was really paralyzed. So I just walked away, and his happiness—about the Jewish souvenirs—I didn't want to wait in case he should mention that he had Jewish skin which they were making lamp shades out of.

So I straggled home, I straggled to the place of employment, and I walked up the steps and I came into the kitchen. And my employer waited for me and she said, "Where were you so long? We worried about you." I said, "Why would you worry about me? If somebody kills me you get another maid." And she started to calm me down—she was a little bit kind—and she said, "What happened?" And I just plain told her. And she said, "Whoever gave you permission to go to the ghetto?" I said, "My heart—my heart gave me permission to go to the ghetto. Don't you ever go?" She said, "I don't

even go close to there. There are all those Polish Communists and all those Czechoslovakian Communists." I said, "Yeah, I am one of them. According to your husband I am one of them, so I belong there." She walked out and she said, "You better make dinner fast."

So I did. I was dizzy, I was heartbroken, but I did my job. I didn't eat that night, and they wanted to know why. They wanted to know which Nazi I was sleeping with that I had so much food in me that I didn't eat. Of course these stupidities I didn't answer. A stupid question doesn't deserve an answer.

I was sitting up all night in my room and thinking that maybe I should go into that ghetto, maybe I could help someone. Or maybe I should just go home and just be with my parents. What the hell? As long as I could see them for a little while—what did I care? But my girlfriend and Dr. Rosenock, they told me, "NO." They told me I should keep my promise: They will never get me alive. Rose, my friend, she said, "Remember what you came in with? You came in with a high head and with strong legs, and a great willpower: 'They will never get me alive, they will never get me alive.'" "Yeah," I said, "that was me. Maybe the courage from my parents kept me going—or—I don't know, but after this..." She said, "Let's keep strong. Let's not do what the enemies want us to do."

So, all night I went through this. Of course in the morning I got up. I didn't have to get up—I was up. And I just did what I was supposed to do and waited again for that afternoon. But that afternoon, for some reason, the ghetto wasn't even opened. Probably there was a little bit of killing, or a lot, or burying, or who knows...they didn't always even bother to

bury the dead bodies. It wasn't open, so I just walked around in a daze on the streets. It was one of those days that I couldn't go see my friend Rose. She never told me why I shouldn't see her that day, so I just walked around. It was quite cold, and I was cold, and that reminded me of Jasina, and again and again my mind wandered.

As I was walking near the Danube—how I wound up there I don't know—but I heard screams, I heard a woman screaming. It sounded like a very young woman, so I started running toward the scream, and I saw that a big, fat Nazi—not with one bayonet, but with two—belted her child. One child was standing next to her, and she was holding another. He belted the baby and then he just took the two legs and ripped it apart. And I started screaming and yelling, just screaming and yelling, and when he ripped the baby apart...and when I started screaming and yelling, the woman and the other child ran away and he ran towards me. And I didn't run away; I just walked. He said, "Now—what are you screaming—what are you screaming for? Did that Jew bastard beat you up—or what did she do to you that you are screaming?" I couldn't answer; I just walked by. I just walked by. I really didn't realize then that for the time being I had saved the woman's other child and herself...Herself—what kind of life could she have if she saw a big, fat Nazi ripping apart her child? Maybe it was one year old, and the other was maybe three, the one that was standing next to her. I could not understand, and I still cannot understand why he didn't jump me or shoot me or whatever.

So when I told this to Dr. Rosenock—I just had to talk—he made me talk, he said, "You should feel good. Look at

how many people you save. You saved this mother and this child." I said, "What kind of life can she have if..."

As the time went by I used to see more and more Nazi uniforms, more and more madness on the streets, more and more beatings. It was Jasina all over again. How many times in my lifetime would I have to go through this? There was also in the newspapers a big pronouncement that all the Jews had to register their gold. It looked like the Nazis hadn't taken their gold yet, their silver, their dollars and so on. And that was a very sad, sad reminder for me.

I don't know if my immediate employers were registered as Jews or not. I think they were because I heard later that they were quite upset that they had to register their gold. I'm not sure if the mink coat Mrs. Behrend used to hide—she used to bend down when she passed by the door—had to be registered. But leave it up to them—the hungry Nazis—they skin you...all the way down. They skin you. What heroes! What heroes, My God, what heroes were they! They were fighting on all sides against children, ripping apart children, throwing them in the Danube. Speaking of the Danube—ever since I saw that little babies were thrown in the Danube, I used to make it my business to go there first and then to the ghetto. Maybe to fill my head with fear, with anger, and my heart with pain. Yes, more and more bodies were floating up in the Danube. And nobody asked, nobody knew—I knew very well what they were. They were murdered Jews. They were throwing Jews in the river at that time because for some reason they hadn't started deportation. No, they didn't start the deportation of the Polish Jews yet; the Jews went into the ghetto. There were still murders in the ghetto. But when the ghetto thinned out—I

don't know from how many thousands—it thinned out quickly. One day when I went to get in I couldn't find any of the people I used to talk to and used to see there. It looked like they had either been taken away or murdered. They had special Polish and Ukrainian squads helping the Germans, and of course the Hungarian Nazis too. So they tried to kill quietly for the time being until they would be able to ship the Jew out again.

The summer was quite a long summer, with a lot, a lot of Nazis. And every time I used to come home I used to find—I used to come home—excuse me—I used to come to my place of work, where I worked and where I lived for the time being. I cannot call that home. But I believe where the person has her shoes and cushion and to sleep—that's sort of home. I used to always find Gary and his girlfriend on the same floor where I found out lived this big shot from the Hungarian Parliament—that he was a converted Jew and had one son. His son with his girlfriend, and—holy cow—who were the two girls? The two girls were the shoemaker's two daughters from where Dr. Rosenock lived. How can a son of a big Parliament employee go with a shoemaker's girl? And Jewish yet! And I knew the secret, I knew from the superintendent the secret that the big shot and his family were converted Jews, but nobody was supposed to know. I didn't ask any questions, I just waved my hand and said "Hi" to them and that's all. And that happened almost daily.

Every time I would go out shopping, the wife of the Parliament official—she would sort of follow me. She would like open the window or in door in the hall where she could see me walking out—so she knew when I was going shopping.

She would follow me; just follow me. Once I stopped and I didn't go on—I refused to walk. And she stopped too. Then I made a big circle and started running back. And she followed me. After a few days I just stopped and I said to her, "What do you want?" She said, "I waited for you to ask me. I want to ask you something. Do you see my son and Gary together with two girls in the apartment?" I said, "Why do you want to know?" She said to me, "Answer me, little peasant girl. Do you see them—yes or no?" I said to her, "Your highness, you shouldn't even talk to a peasant girl," and I said, "Good-bye. And if you follow me again I'm gonna go to the police." She said, "No—you wouldn't go to the police because your employer wouldn't let you. He knows who we are, he knows we have a lot of power. So you better not tell him what happened today." I didn't answer. Thank God I had already learned the hard way not to answer—and certainly not to this stupid woman anyway.

So I went shopping that day. And I saw a lot of people wearing the yellow star. It was only certain people. They didn't seem to have citizenship papers, they weren't or they were Hungarian citizens—I'm not sure—but they wore the yellow star. I looked and stared after every person. Especially, I saw a very young woman there.

And when I came back I called Gary to the side, and I said to him, "Look, Gary. This lady from the other side of the building followed me yesterday. She ran after me, and she just wanted to force me to tell her if I see you, and her son, and the two girls. You know—the two shoemaker girls in the apartment." He said, "My God, what did you say?! What did you say?!" I said, "You know what I said—I didn't answer

her. I didn't answer her." He said, "Great , great. Never say nothing. Never say a word, 'cause I'm not supposed to—not because I'm not supposed to go with girls—but I'm not supposed to go with poor girls, and most of all I'm not supposed to go with Jewish girls." I looked at him with suspicious eyes, and he said, "No, oh no. Oh no, no." I said, "What do you mean, 'Oh no, Ilana, no?'" He said, "You don't know nothing, do you?" I said, "Of course I don't know nothing. What can a peasant girl know? I don't." Then he put his fingers to his mouth. "You ar'not that stupid, but sssh. You must be quiet. By the way, we gonna talk another time of what we know and what we don't know." Then I asked him, "Gary, are you familiar—the last few weeks I see—did you see a lot of people with yellow Jewish stars?" He said, "Yes, I saw it in the newspapers that certain people—and they are Hungarian citizens, but nobody knows exactly—must wear the yellow star." And he said, he said to me, "You were right. I have a feeling that soon we all will wear the yellow star." I said, "We'll see." And then I almost wanted to ask him about the neighbors, if it was true that they were converted Jews and that their son didn't know it. But I watched my skin and didn't say anything.

And he said to me, "What else do you see on the streets?" I said to him, "You know I go to the ghetto every day." I didn't tell him I carry medicine because I didn't want him to mention it to his grandfather—his grandfather told me not to tell nobody. "I just go in the ghetto. Maybe I find somebody from my family. And there I see many dead bodies." He said, "No. Really?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Were they young people or old?" I said, "How can you recognize from a skeleton

if it's young or old?" He said, " You mean you really saw skeletons?" I said, "Yes."

"You have any knowledge of who does it?" he asked.

"Yeah. I was told by a young man that once in a while they let some Ukrainians and Hungarians in and they start beating the Jews 'til they die. Then they just dump them." "Oh my God," he said. "Oh my God, what is this city coming to?" I said, "I don't know, but it reminds me of Jasina where I was born."

And then he tried to joke. He said, "Did you bring the tragedy to the city?" I said, "Could be. If I did, I did. Could be. But your father said it can never happen here, so you don't have to worry, I guess." And that was the end of the discussion for that evening.

As more and more Nazi soldiers were visible in Budapest, more and more Jews were killed. More and more air raids. Oh, the air raids—that was my entertainment. I used to love them. I used to love them regardless of what time at night it was. I used to wait for them. And when the bombs came rushing down—I loved that too. There was only one question in my mind: Why cannot they bomb Auschwitz? Why cannot they bomb Mathausen? Why do they just bomb Budapest? They probably have strategic targets here, but why couldn't they do the same thing to the concentration camps? That was my question, but still—it was entertainment to me. It was entertainment when people started screaming and were afraid, and I just said to myself, "I hope you all feel what my people feel."

Of course I had a chance to see the cream of the crop pinned down in the basements, in the shelters, in the middle

of the night when they came down screaming. My God, what a bunch of ugly people they were. Ugly people in their looks, and ugly people in their behavior—selfish. One woman screamed—death!—because she forgot the jar of cocoa. She didn't take it down to the basement with her—big deal! She just insisted her husband should go up to the fourth floor to bring it down. And I would have loved to ask her if she could not live without the cocoa, without the chocolate milk. The hysteria, the hysteria—My God!

Of course that street wasn't bombed, where I lived. But not far from Dr. Rosenock, quite a few buildings were bombed out, and good. Some air raids lasted all night. I loved every minute of it. I wasn't sleepy. I was just sitting there, like numb, observing the elite—the Hungarian so—called elite. And just asking the question, "Why not Auschwitz? Why not the other horror places? Maidanek, and so forth and so forth."

I also saw once when I went to the Danube—I don't now why I went to the Danube—I cannot remember....What? Did I go to count the bodies, or did I want to jump down, or what did I do there? On the way home I used to ask my questions. I saw a big crowd of people near a church and amazingly—amazingly—it was the time when the Nazis were marching. I walked over and I asked them, "Why are you standing outside? Why don't you go in the church?" And some of them didn't answer me. Others, the answer was, "We are going, we are going to convert here so we should be free. We don't want to be Jews anymore." And the Nazis on the horses, they were clippity—clopping around, back and forth in front of the church, and there were maybe about three hundred people.

And I said to them, "Well, who told you that when you convert you can be spared? What good—what good will it do you? Well, some people answered me, "Well, why don't you stay in line and find out?" The other people answered me and they said, "Yes, we will be spared. We have been promised by the priest that if we convert, we be spared and we don't have to suffer like the rest of the Jews."

"Oh, so you want to save your skin," I said. Well, I got these harsh looks, and I said to myself, "Uh—oh, you did it again, you're talking too much." Okay...

I left that day and I didn't see what happened. But two days later I walked by the same church and I saw another crowd. And then one man suggested that I should line up too, I should be free myself once and for all. I lined up, and I just wanted to find out again why. And they said, well, the priest and the Nazis promised them that when they convert and give up all their jewelry, all the money they have, all the paintings—they will be spared.

And I said to myself, "Well, let me see how this works. I'm curious how the Jews can be spared." But I didn't want to stay in the line, I was too ashamed to stay in the line with Jews who wanted to be converted to be saved; saved from the Nazis, saved from themselves—or just what? Anyway, as I was waiting there on the side, I didn't see anybody coming out of the church. All those that walked in didn't come out of the church, so I asked somebody, "How come they don't come back?" And I was told because they were waiting to be taken to a safer place. I said, "By who?" And they said to me, "Well, some trucks are waiting in the back of the church." Like usually "trucks" meant... my heart starting beating faster.

Well, I went in back of the church, and I was standing a little bit away because I sure didn't have it in my guts at that time to face a German on just that day. I saw a big crowd—maybe of sixty people—come out of the back of the church, and the Nazis started to stampede them with their horses—jumped them with their horses. Some of them they stampeded to death, and others that was the way they chased them into the truck—the truck that was waiting outside in the back. So they stampeded them—it happened so fast. So they chased them into the truck, and those that were dead they dumped the bodies into another truck. And there was not a scream or a yell. They were probably so glad that now that they converted they were gonna go to a better place. Even their friends who were standing in line with them were dead—stampeded.

Well, the trucks—yes—the trucks went straight to Mathausen, Mathausen concentration camp, Mathausen crematorium. How do I know? I just walked straight up to a German and asked him: "Where do you take these people?" He said, "Mathausen, fraulein, Mathausen. You want to join them?" I walked away. I thought he was going to follow me—but no one followed me except the ghosts, the ghosts of all dead Jews, all tortured Jews. I didn't ask anymore why—I didn't even ask myself why I was labeled a Communist—why some Jews were labeled Zionist and other Jews...from other people I heard that all the Jews were rich and that's why they had to be eliminated because they were very rich. They run the governments, they run the banks, they run everything—which was, unfortunately, untrue. No Jew could have gotten a big position in Hungary if he didn't convert.

And that's probably the reason why this man and his wife converted, because he had quite a big position in Parliament. And nobody was supposed to know—but how did the janitor know? Once a Jew always a Jew? How did she know? And she said it with such a smirk: "That's a Jew too, yet he's in Parliament." She said it with a smirk, and I knew that if some Germans should come she would be the first one to point at him, because she was happy she might be getting something out of his apartment.

Yeah, I saw many times the German heroes, the German heroes beating people, shooting people, throwing them in the Danube. What a heroic people they are—what a heroic people when they can steal, rob, kill—they're big heroes.

Well, I still went home to the place and the sadness was really there. It started to spread. They probably found out what was going on. The next morning, a couple of women came into the kitchen and wanted to see the apartment. Of course I wouldn't let them see the apartment. I said I had to ask my employer, my boss. They didn't wait for me to ask—they pushed me aside and ran through the house. And the big lawyer with all his medals, he was sitting like paralyzed. They didn't say a word—they just left. When they left he jumped me. He said, "What a stupid peasant are you! How come you let them in? How come you let them in—how come you didn't call me?" I said, "I'm sorry, they didn't wait for me to let them in, they didn't wait for you to invite them. They just ran through the house and you were sitting there. They didn't ask me."

Well, I saw what was coming, I really saw what was coming. And it was pretty bad. Soon enough the exchange took

place. Like Dr. Rosenock said: I went back there, because my behavior was probably too Jewish, and Margaret went to the lawyer. But as good as she was, and peaceful and all, and the Behrends thought she was devoted, she told them she didn't want to work for Jews anymore. Even if she couldn't get any other job she didn't want to work for them, and she left. So—the Behrends wouldn't come for dinner to the Rosenocks' because they didn't want to mix, so they shouldn't sort of sell themselves out too fast. Anyway, somehow the government did let them stay in that building, but the lawyer—Behrend—he was under house arrest. They couldn't go out, and they had a hard time getting food.

Well, the doctor had many friends, many friends among the population, and he managed to send them in food. Many times we would cook it in our kitchen there—Mrs. Rosenock and I—and send it to them. Then a lot of streets were eliminated of the Jews. But the street that the doctor lived in —that was a house that many Jews lived in—was created into a new ghetto. Dr. Rosenock was supposed to take in as many people as he could. He did. He took in a family: a chemical engineer, his wife, and two little girls. The chemical engineer had prostheses—he lost both of his hands in a chemical explosion when he was a student. They were amazingly good people, but they lost everything in no time. Then there came another family. Two older people. They didn't speak Hungarian too well, and I found out later that they were from Czechoslovakia too. My God, where was Aunt Helen, Dr. Rosenock's sister? Where was she? "Yes," Dr. Rosenock told me, "she was grabbed on the street once and we don't know where she is." So, quiet extermination. An older woman—Dr.

Rosenock's sister—was grabbed on the street, children were thrown in the Danube, and I wondered how may Jews still claimed that with their medals they might be spared. I wished them luck...

The air raids were terrible. In the daytime, at night—there was no let up. Of course—there—I felt much better; I really felt good in the Rosenocks', because I was accepted. I was accepted as a Jewish girl, not some kind of peasant who's a Communist. So I felt good. I prayed to God they shouldn't get hurt by the raids—and they didn't. Otherwise, the same question went through my mind: Why not Auschwitz, Meidenak, Mathausen, Bergen—Belsen, and so on and so on... Soon enough I got a postcard from my parents, and it was those suspicious postcards—yes, the Nazis were taking them to some ghetto. Boarded them first to the Jasina cemetery and then somewhere to a ghetto. And all the time I hope that the Russians are near the border, they will occupy Jasina—maybe my parents will be safe. I don't care what happens to me—maybe they will be safe, along with my smaller younger sisters and brothers. Unfortunately, the Nazis took them all. In fact, my brother who was in Budapest, without me even knowing he went back to Jasina—just into the biggest fire. Just into the biggest fire because all the boys from the home he was living in—apprentices—went home. He did too. I found it out too late. The pain in my heart is unbelievable to describe—unbelievable.

It's just a shame that I couldn't go and join the partisans somewhere, because I would have been a very dangerous person if I'd just been given a gun and I could have just started shooting. I felt like doing it all the time, and I even talked

to the doctor about it. He said, "My child, please—somebody has to remain alive, somebody has to remain alive to tell the story." And he put his two hands on my head—he had a tallis on—and he said, "You will be it." I said, "How about you? You will be it too. You are a more deserving person than anybody." He said, "I'm an old man, my child. My grandchildren have no idea—they were never taught what Jewish is or is not." I said, "Doctor, believe me, you have nothing to worry about with Gary. I don't know about little Ann, but Gary's a very bright guy. Nobody can tell him what to do." He said, "Who knows? Who knows? I hope, my child, you are right."

And so we were talking. I just didn't run around on the streets so much because I plain felt a little bit more at home with the doctor, the engineer who was there, and Mrs. Rosenock. I just felt I was among my own people. So my restlessness stopped, yet I did go to the ghetto—even more often because the doctor sent me, the doctor sent me. I couldn't go straight from the house where the doctor lived because those houses were watched by the Nazis. I would go out through the back and circle around, and that's how I would hop in the ghetto and stay there, and then come home and just give him all the news.

There were big deportations from there, and the ghetto thinned out—thinned out through death—and I saw more and more skeletons, more and more bodies, and I saw the trucks being loaded. How much I wished I should be loaded on one of the trucks—just to run into my parents and see them once more. Wish...wish, wish—hope against hope; hope against hope.

Then this young guy, who I used to talk to almost every time I went into the ghetto, he would wait for me like he was

waiting for God. He gave me a little ring that he made from a string—I don't know—a rope he found. And he started to compose a song to me. The song went like this...and he was singing it, quietly of course. He was singing it with beautiful words. And it went like this:

> In a beautiful summer night, under the shiny moon
> You gave me the most beautiful gift—
> to be able to hope.
> And I never forget your words:
> you have to hope against hope
> (or in other words—hope against hopelessness).
> But I shall try to be strong
> because I do want to see you
> when this mess ends—I do.
> And this is the only gift I can give you—
> a little braided ring.

Well, I was speechless, because that was the most intelligent young man I had ever met. We had many, many long talks. He had much more education than I did. And little did I know that that was the last time I saw him because he was taken away soon. I was told by other people who used to see us talk all the time.

If I would have just known...I felt sorry for a long time, because I just didn't stay. But they would have taken us together—who knows? Who tells? So, I lost my brother. My brother ran back home to maybe be on the safe side when the Russians reoccupy Jasina. I lost my best friend in the ghetto—two of them already. And I just hoped and prayed that Dr.

Rosenock should be all right—because if you don't have friends to talk to, it's worse than when you don't have bread, when you don't have food.

When I came back from the ghetto once, Dr. Rosenock said to me that he was afraid that I might have to be on my own. Because he had to go—he had to go into hiding. He could not stay there anymore because the Nazis were after them. And like I taught him—oh, what a compliment he gave me—he said, "You taught me they will not get you alive, and I'm going to follow your hymn; I'm going to sing the same song. Of course I'm an old man and my wife is even older, but we are going to try, and try and try—they should not get us alive, either." Well, my heart started shaking, my hands shook, my heart cried, and he cried. And every morning from then on he would put on his tallis and put his two hands on my head and say, "You will make it—you will make it."

Chapter Nine

THAT WAS A VERY, VERY LONG SUMMER—'43—and a very long fall. And there were no more New Year's parties, no more Christmas parties—but Nazi parties—everywhere there were Nazis. And the doctor told me that the king was thrown off his throne. They let him go to Switzerland, and the Niloches—Niloches are what they call the Hungarian Fascists—took over. And that was the end, that was the end. Nobody would be spared from now on. So I had to be on my own, and he had to go into hiding. And we were talking and talking. And the blessing went on. And he said he wished he would be able to take me with him, but he couldn't, so he really had no idea what to suggest. I said, "Doctor, don't worry about me. There are so many bombed-out houses. Here I walk, I scream at a Nazi when he rips apart a Jewish child and throws it in the Danube and he doesn't shoot me—he didn't shoot me. I scream at Nazis when I see them kicking the Jews after they come out from the church converted—they didn't shoot me either. So I'm just going to try to survive. I promise you I try to survive." He said, "My child, I have a little money and I want to give it to you." And I said, "I don't want it." Anyway, he gave me some; his wife gave me some warm

clothes. So I packed a small bag, and I knew already—I had already prepared which house I would live in.

But just before Dr. Rosenock left he gave me the address from a Catholic hospital. And he said, "If you can manage to be very quiet—you come there in two weeks. You must not know me, you must not look at me—you just pretend you never saw me. But you come in with your paper—Ilana Kovatch. I told a friend of mine about you and he will hire you as an errand girl or a nurse's aide. What do you know about nursing?" I said, "Nothing, just that I bandaged some patients in your office." He said, "You did a darn good job. Why don't you tell him that...

You must wear a big cross. I don't know where we can get it, but I'm gonna try to get it for you. When you come in this hospital do you know how to cross yourself?" I said, "No, I don't." He said, "Well, I don't know either, but if you go with the nuns to mass or whatever, you observe them closely because you cannot afford to make a mistake. Observe them closely and cross yourself and kneel and do everything they do. And most of all don't talk—absolutely don't talk."

So I felt very, very lonely because my best friends were going into hiding. I hoped to God they would make it. And I wouldn't even have anyone to talk to. But I did learn to talk to myself, I did learn—with my mind. I also learned escapism—fantasies. Without fantasies I never would have been able to make it. All kind of fantasies. With the fantasies I used to fall asleep, and with the fantasies I used to wake up. In one fantasy I got somewhere a big bread and my mother was slicing it and everybody was getting a piece.

A few weeks went by, and the doctor finally said good—bye and he said, "Did you look over this bombed—out house? You should go there. Make sure it's not a ghetto house, and make sure it's not a Jewish house—you know by now." I said, "Yes, I made sure there is not one Jew and there is no one else. I mean the people are afraid to go in, but I found a bed there. There are quite a few refrigerators full of food." He said, "Not upstairs—the basement?" I said, "I don't go to the basement because in the basement probably the people took all their belongings, so there would be nothing for me down there."

So we said good-bye to each other and he said, "You have to wait about ten, twelve days 'til I settle this hospital job for you, and then you follow. You come to see what they can do for you."

And when I came in he didn't give me a particular name to ask for anybody, so I shouldn't be suspicious. I wanted work, and they asked me what kind of work I wanted and I said, "Well, I take any kind of work. I learned a little bit of first aid, but I can take any kind of work. I need to eat. And I don't have a place to stay." And a priest started questioning, "Where did you stay?" So I told him, "I stayed in this building; it was bombed out."

"How about your parents?" the priest said. "How about your parents—where were they?" I said, "Well, my father ran away a long time ago, and my mother got completely senile after the bombing."

So Ilana Kovatch got a nurse's aide job with the nuns. And I said, "I'll need a little training. I don't know much." One nun said, "Don't worry about it. All you will do is hold

the bandages or wash the people or so forth. You'll get room and board—that's all we can afford." I said, "That's beautiful, that's more than I expected. And thank you."

So I was shown into a room where there two other women. One was a cleaning woman, the other was a clerk. They were living there. Boy, did I get scared. I got scared like hell because I talked Yiddish in my sleep, and why did I need to sleep with the two women in one room? I got scared like hell, and didn't know what to do. But I got the job and I was gonna get food. I could cover my head with a pillow or whatever.

So, I went and I worked mostly with the nuns, and for the first week I looked all over but I didn't even see Dr. Rosenock. But I saw another doctor who was a little bit younger than Dr. Rosenock, and he looked me straight in the eyes with such kindness I had a feeling he probably knew Dr. Rosenock and he knew my situation. Constantly, constantly—he even put some money in my hands. And once he even asked me, "Are you eating enough?" I winked with my eyes, and I said, "Yes." And I found out when he said, "Okay, good. I'm going to tell your friend and my friend that you have enough food because he asked me to look after you." I didn't answer anything, I didn't ask where he is—nothing.

In the three months I was there I just saw Dr. Rosenock passing by very fast once. Where they kept him I still don't know. But I was glad I saw him and he was smiling when he saw me. We just passed by each other fast. I guess he just made it his business to walk by where he thought I would be just to see me. It felt good. My God, does it feel good to have friends. There is just nothing like it, and the only time you find out if you have friends—when the situations are bad.

When everything goes good for you, everybody's your friend. Like they say: when you laugh the whole world laughs with you; when you cry, you cry alone. It wasn't so bad—I had a friend. I had ghetto friends. Unfortunately they killed them. I had Dr. Rosenock. He lived through the war.

In that hospital I saw a lot of injured Germans, a lot of injured Germans. All they did—the ones that I saw—they cursed the Russians, they cursed the Jews. And they said that they didn't want to go on the Russian front anymore. They didn't mind going south, on the southern front, but not on the Russian front. And I said to myself, "You goddamned Fritz—good for you." I really had enjoyment in that hospital. Once I just took a little bit of salt when the nun turned around and I just poured it on the wound of a big Nazi general. Boy, did he scream, and I loved every minute of it. Of course I ran out. I knew he could not say anything. I ran out like I wasn't there. I tried to pull the trick other times, but it didn't work for me.

That was a great feeling—to pour salt on a Nazi general's wound. How nice that was. Just thinking of that little kid that was torn apart and thrown in the Danube, thinking of the Jewish bodies in the Danube.

So I became a nun's assistant, and I did all kinds of errands. And I even learned to cross myself, and I wore this big, big cross. In fact, one of the nuns even gave me earrings that had crosses. Earrings! My God, my ears were still swollen because I had the earrings—diamond earrings that my grandmother gave me—pulled off me by the Germans way back in Poland. So now I couldn't stand earrings. I never wanted to wear them. And she asked me how come my earlobes were

ripped. I said, "I really don't know. I think it was because I have cheap steel earrings." How could I tell her that my diamond earrings were ripped off my earlobes, with my flesh. Anyway, she didn't insist that I stick them in. I was glad.

They didn't talk to me much; they ignored me. After all, I was just a peasant girl, thank God. And it gave me a chance to observe them. They were quite happy about what was happening to the Jews, and they quite happily cheered the Nazis. And they were very mad at the Russians because the Germans who came to this hospital came from the Russian front, they came pretty much chopped up—very chopped up. And they cursed the Communists, they cursed the Russians, they cursed the Jews. And they constantly said, "Thank God we don't have any Jewish doctors in this hospital." I had to pinch myself not to say anything, because according to what I knew there were about three of them.

But I just listened to them and just listened. One of them said that all she would like to take from some Jews is their eyes. That's how hateful they were. I would have loved to ask her why. St. Mary's Hospital was to me another proof that the whole world really gangs up on the Jew. And I just would have liked to ask them from time to time: Why?

Well, in the hospital I heard from the nuns and from other people that all the Jews were rich. They take all—they have all the money, they have all the power, and that's why it didn't bother anybody that they were killing the Jews. In fact, from what I saw in the hospital they were pretty much helping the Nazis—the way they catered to them. Once when they brought in a shot person and they started to treat him, wash his wound, well then suddenly there was a lot of noise

in the emergency room (or first-aid room like they called it there). There was a lot of noise. They discovered that the wounded person was a Jew. How did they discover that? Through pulling down his pants. Yes, the nuns pulled down his pants and they discovered that he was a Jew and out he went.

Well, this was just enough for me, and I really didn't have much interest to stay there anymore. And it just happened that a few days later, when they were talking and giggling how they threw out the circumcised Jew, and I was very quiet, like usual, I didn't say a word, and they asked me, "He wasn't a relative of yours, was he? How come you're so quiet?" I didn't answer. They insisted I should tell them where I came from and all. I told them, "I come from the same place you do, my dear sisters. Yes, from the same place."

"Oh—oh—oh—wasn't that wounded Jew your relative?" I said, "Not only was the wounded Jew my relative, but the man in the picture—Jesus Christ—was my relative too." They started to cross themselves—they started to run in every direction. So did I. That was it. Then I took to the streets.

That was it, and I felt much better on the street. I didn't have to hide—I didn't give a damn by that time. I felt sure my parents had been taken to Auschwitz. I didn't give a damn about myself. In fact, I felt even—even though it was war and shooting, and many times I saw still Jewish people being dragged and still thrown in the Danube—or dragged to the trains—I felt free. I felt free. At least I was out and I didn't care what happened. I ran from one bombed house to the other, but one thing I was very concerned about was what Dr.

Rosenock would think when he found out I wasn't there. And I know he had certain people watching out for me, because like this other doctor handed me some money and always looked at me with kind eyes. So I know that was because of Dr. Rosenock's request.

So I didn't have to work and I had free room and board from all the bombed houses—there was plenty of food, especially in the non-Jewish houses that were bombed. I used to walk by every day, near Dr. Rosenock's daughter's house. Just maybe I'd get a glimpse of them—the Behrends probably had some connection with him—and they should tell him that I was okay. I knew—I felt it in my heart that the Rosenocks worried about me just like about their own children.

For the longest time I was lucky. And I wasn't afraid, I really wasn't afraid to walk around, because I believed what would happened would happen. But when I ran into them—it was the converted Jew and I really don't remember their names, his wife and him—they staggered me. He gave me such a stern look—he pushed his wife to call me over. She came over and she said, "Listen, little peasant, you must be Jewish too, because you disappeared; as soon as it was an order that no Jews should live in our building, you disappeared." And I said to her, "How about you? What's your background?" Well, they both got very red, they both got very red. And they were so furious I'm sure they would have done something to me if they weren't afraid. Then they asked me how many times I saw this girl Susan and her sister with their son. I said, "Your son is a grown man—why don't you ask him? Why do you keep asking me? This is the third time

that you're asking me." Then she broke down in tears and she said, "I tell you why. Because we don't want him to go with this little Jewish girl. And it's all Gary's fault that he's going around with her, because Gary gives him an opportunity to meet in his house; Gary dates one sister and he dates the other."

And I said to her in a sarcastic way, "You're pretty lucky that your son found such a nice girl, and you should consider yourself fortunate." Her husband gave her such a schlep, such a pull, and they schlepped away from me, and another relief I felt in my heart. I really did. I don't care what will be, I just like to speak out the truth.

So it was pretty lonely, it was really lonely to sleep in the bombed—out houses. Of course there were plenty of blankets and I wasn't cold. There was plenty of stashed—away food—I onlyhad to find it. Once I saw a picture on a wall and something told me to take that picture out. And behind the picture there was a vault. In that vault there was sugar, in the vault there were crackers, there was syrup—I had a ball. First time in a long I really ate. I ate and laughed. I just wished I had somebody to share it with, or at least somebody to talk to.

I felt very lonely—gee whiz—very lonely. On the street I couldn't talk to anybody, in my hideaway I couldn't talk to anybody. I figured if this doesn't end the loneliness will kill me. But it was still better than the Nazis. But from time to time there was entertainment, and it happened at least two, three times a week: bombs. How I loved those bombs. How I counted how many were coming down; which way they were going—the planes—and which way they were coming

back. Once I was even standing on the fourth floor of a half bombed-out building and just watching them. It was the biggest pleasure...Again and again: Why didn't they bomb Auschwitz? Why didn't they bomb those death cells, all of those death cells? Who can I talk to? So I talked to myself.

There was no more ghetto, as they dragged all the people away, those that weren't shot. But there were plenty of skeletons in the ghetto, plenty of skeletons, and nobody bothered to close it up anymore. And as there were no more live Jews in the ghetto, I felt very depressed, very depressed going in.

It was a very cold winter, between '43 and '44, and I probably didn't go out much—so I really don't know what happened. I really don't know what happened, but suddenly I found myself marching with the rest of the Jews. Not really marching, sort of dragging because I felt like I was half frozen. I don't know how they got me into their group—I don't know nothing—I really don't remember. And as I was marching I was just holding hands—I felt I'm home again and among my own people. Holding hands with another woman, not talking a word. She was frozen and I was frozen. And the air raids came again. Oh, what a beautiful sound: the air raids. And as the air raids came, the big heroes, the Nazis...whew, were they big heroes! How they dragged defenseless women and children and old men—because all the younger men were killed by that time—and sent them to the camps. What kind of heroes? As long as they didn't send them to the Russian front they were big heroes. Fat pigs—how I would have loved to spit in their faces...but I couldn't. I held it back because this woman said, "Don't do nothing, my child. Maybe one of us will survive. And if we are all shot and there are a few young children left—

they might make it through—including you." So I didn't. And the air raids came...

Suddenly we remained without lords—they all ran away to hide. And none of the people...there were maybe 120...ran away. We all looked up to heaven. We all looked up to heaven because the air raids were our saviors. I really don't know again what happened—as I looked up to heaven somebody pulled me and dragged me so hard. I said, "Well, good-bye world. This is it. I didn't win this time. They did get me." Somebody pulled me and they pulled all the younger kids with them.

And the air raids were still going on when we were put in a bus—a real bus!—and dragged away somewhere. Standing there were two young men, in their thirties, I don't know who they were, but the smiles on their faces didn't look like they were Nazis. The smiles on their faces gave me such comfort, the first time in years. I don't know why, or maybe I felt this was the answer—why not?—and it felt good.

Suddenly I saw one of them take out some crackers and give them to the children, the younger children. And that proved to me, "My God, who is this? Is this the Jewish messiah or who is this? He is saving a few young children." Even I got a cracker—the last one. And I was delighted that he gave hot chocolate to the younger children.

Not a word was exchanged. And the air raids were still going on when we were taken to a building—a building on the side of Budapest that I never saw. We were taken and unloaded so fast—pushed—"Fast, in the building." Then I saw a flag on the bus, a flag which I didn't know whose it was or I really didn't remember. It was a yellow-blue flag.

Which country is a yellow-blue flag? No questions asked. Nothing. They pushed us in the building and each and every one of us got a little certificate. It was like a little book with a certain name, and on the top it was the same yellow-blue flag and it said: "Swedish Citizens." I got one too. We were supposed to fill in our names. Suddenly I became a Swedish citizen. I kept in mind what Dr. Rosenock told me: miracles exist. They will always happen, they are always around us. Yes, but where was the miracle for my sisters and brothers, my parents, and all the others? I probably spoke aloud because an older man came over and gave me a push and told me, "Be quiet—don't talk." So I was quiet, and I tried to ask him where we were—where I was. And he said, "You are among friends and just be quiet—you will find out soon."

I did find out soon. We were sitting in a big hallway and they started giving out again hot chocolate. They didn't get to me, but it was fine—there were younger children. Hot chocolate and crackers again. And we were all sitting. Some of the children looked like skeletons—I don't know where they got them.

We were all sitting. The kids were shivering from fear or from cold or from both. Then this young man showed up, a handsome, good—looking guy, and he spoke a little bit of Hungarian. He said, "I want you to know that you are under the Swedish government's protection. From now on you consider yourselves Swedish citizens. That's why we gave you the little certificates. You cannot go on the streets, but nobody will bother you here. And this is all I can say. Try to get along with each other because there isn't much space and there might be ten to fifteen people to a room. The same thing to a toilet."

My God, ten, fifteen people to a room: that was beautiful. I had somebody to talk to, or I could hear somebody breathing. In the bombed-out house, nobody breathed, but once in a while a cat would run through. I didn't even see rats or mice because those were bombed—out fancy houses. They didn't have rats and mice.

So we were dead tired, all of us, and many of the children feel asleep right there, and they were taken later to certain rooms. I was told to go to a room where there were two families—two families. They had teenagers about my age. All in all there were twelve people. It was great! My God, I didn't have much more than a corner—just to lie down because my legs were very swollen from the cold and from walking. So I just laid down and kept my feet warm and just hoped that soon this mess would be over.

Chapter Ten

THE AIR RAIDS were really terrible. They were constant. They were English bombers—very large ones. And they always hit the civilian population. Not that I cared, but I observed very closely that they avoided the military installments that were not far away.

The nuns had been very unfriendly, very unfriendly and cursing constantly. And what went on in that hospital is really impossible to describe. I would never have believed it if I hadn't seen it firsthand.

But in the Swedish house it was different. The people were sitting quietly, worried. I was very glad to see families still whole—like mother, father, and children. It was really a blessing; it was really a little comforting. Once when the air raids were constant—I really never felt like going down in the basement, but I did. I did once, just to see how many people were in that building. It was the Swedish building—that means it was protected under the Swedish flag. Later on I found out who was the savior, who was the guardian angel. It was Raoul Wallenberg, a young man. I had never seen him really. But that was the talk, what was that I found out in the basement when we were once down there a whole night.

I saw a very familiar face there, and it was Susan, the shoemaker's daughter, with her parents. But I didn't see her younger sister. I ran over and she ran over to me. And she couldn't place me for a while, who I was, and I told her. And I asked her, "Susan, where is Gary? Where is your boyfriend Gary?" She said, "Didn't you hear?" I said, "No. What happened to Gary? First tell me where your sister is." She said, "Wait, wait—don't rush so much...where my sister is? Oh, I tell you later, but first about Gary." Gary was her boyfriend. "You see those converted Jews? They call themselves..."

First I asked Susan, "What is their name? I heard in the building all about them." She said, "You heard that they are converted Jews, but their son never knew?" "What is their son's name?" I asked. "Oh—my sister's boyfriend?" Susan replied. I said, "Yeah, your sister's boyfriend." "His name is Yanosh and their second name is Genderhausen," she told me. "Oh, so that's your sister's boyfriend—where is your sister?" She said, "My sister and Yanosh are somewhere in hiding."

"How about Gary—where is your boyfriend?" She said, "Didn't you hear about him?" I said, "No, I didn't hear about him". She said, "The Genderhausens came in with such a storm, and I was sitting there with Gary, and they demanded to know where their son is with my sister. And Gary said, 'I don't know.' And he really didn't know because I didn't even know—they disappeared. Then Yanosh Genderhausen's father pulled out a gun and shot Gary—shot Gary in the side of his stomach."

"He did? My God! Where is Gary?"

"Well, Gary is very sick and he's home," she said. "He's

home, but I cannot go there because they will recognize me." I said, "Oh my God—and your sister?" She said, "I don't know where my sister is, but when Yanosh found out—he did find out—not so much from Gary but from us. We told him that we cannot be free anymore, that we have to go into hiding; that we have these passports to a Swedish house and we have to go. And he couldn't stand it. He took my sister, and they are somewhere else in hiding—I don't know where."

"And what is Gary like—what does he feel like?" And she started to cry, she started to cry so much that I cried with her. I said, "Susan, tell me what—"

"Gary is home and they have a doctor coming, because they are afraid to put him in a hospital so the hospital staff shouldn't see he's circumcised—which he was—and then it would be trouble."

Oh my God, I felt terrible. I just felt the same way I had when I found out that my brother went back to Jasina—such tightness, such soreness. Susan and I were sitting and talking six hours, quietly in that basement. Sometimes we helped out with the crying children—both of us. We were sitting and talking and she told me many, many things that I didn't know—didn't know about the Behrends, my employers, and didn't know about the Genderhausens.

"So he blamed Gary for telling his son that they were Jewish?"

"Yes, he blamed Gary. And it wasn't really Gary's fault, or maybe Yanosh just wanted to be with my sister, so maybe my sister told him because Gary had told us and we kept it quiet. So maybe my sister finally told him."

"So what's the big deal? Your parents are Jewish, and so are they. Except the Genderhausens don't want you and your sister to know because they converted. You know Yanosh's father has a big parliamentary job, and he's the nut that got Gary."

I talked to Susan. I said, "Look, Susan, I'm not afraid—I have nothing to lose. I'm sure they took my parents to Auschwitz. I got a last postcard. I really have nothing to lose. If you agree, I go over to the Behrends. I go over when it's a little quiet." And she said, "Do you have a Swedish passbook?" I said, "I don't have a Swedish passbook. I just have sort of a certificate, a little piece of paper." And she looked it over and she said, "Oh, that's not the real thing." I said, "I don't care, Susan. Let me go."

Well, she insisted that I should take her certificate, it was in her real name, and I should go. And she told me when to go—in the afternoon—and find out how Gary is and if he needs something.

So there was this first—aid room in the Swedish house, this first—aid room, and I said to her, "Well, let's go in and get some aspirins. Maybe the Behrends don't have any." And she still held my hand and she said, "I don't want you to go—you went through so much." I said, "Yes, well, they won't get me alive—maybe dead." And Susan said, "Big hero, big hero." I said, "I don't know if I'm a big hero, did you ever look through the window when the Nazis dragged out the last few Jews? Here Budapest is surrounded. Surrounded already for three months, and it's bombed. But making war on Jews is their display, their heroism. Instead of going to the front and fighting for their fatherland, they're dragging out a few half-dead Jews."

"Yes," she said, "you are so right, you are so right." And we were telling each other many other things.

One afternoon, with Susan's blessing—and she walked with me a little bit to make my trip easier—I went. And I said to myself, "I'm going down to the Behrends (it was about a thirty-minute walk). God, I hope the Nazis don't see me go in there. And if they see me I'm just going to use my father's tactics that he taught me: I'm just going to kick them. I'm going to kick the shit out of them because Gary didn't dare go to the hospital; the Nazis might find out he was Jewish." Gary was the best person of that whole family—of that whole building.

So I went and I had to knock on the door, and they were scared but they came downstairs. The bell didn't work because Budapest had been surrounded by that time for three months, and there was no electricity. They came down three flights of steps. When I say "they": it was Mrs. Behrend and Oniska—their nickname for their daughter. And suddenly I saw a grown—up girl—I didn't see anymore a little tantrumy girl who thinks she has to get everything a grown—up girl has. Her mother started hugging me and kissing me and she said, "I feel so good that you're here. Just to touch you, because now we can understand what you went through—now we can understand. And you give us great comfort to us here. Come upstairs." I said, "Well, maybe I shouldn't go. I just came to really see how Gary is—Susan told me everything." She said, "Oh, you saw Susan. Where?" (They had no idea where Susan was).

Well, Susan gave me a little letter and I gave it to her, and I didn't know if she wanted to give it to Gary or not. But I

went upstairs and all the way up to the third floor. We went through the back—back steps—so these Jew-haters shouldn't see us. And we slid into the apartment. And the apartment had such a big sign on it saying "DO NOT ENTER." I don't know from where the sign came, but it was like nobody should enter because there is an infectious disease. Mrs. Behrend explained to me there was no disease—"it's just we got this because the whole building is very anxious for this apartment. Remember when they came in when you were still here, to look it over so they can get in and just grab it? So we got this from a health organization."

And she took me in and she said, "Look, we don't have much food, but if you want a piece of bread and some cheese we have it." I said, "No, I'm not really hungry. We get rations every day, some bread, and the milk which I give to the children and sometimes the bread too. I really don't feel very hungry lately." And she started telling me the same story that Susan told me. And I said, "But where are Yanosh and Susan's sister?" And she said, "We really don't know; we just hope to God they are all right."

"How about—where are Yanosh's parents?"

"Well, they are still in this building and they'd like nothing better than just to shoot us too." And I asked her, "Isn't it possible to send Gary to a hospital?" She said, "No, because if they find out he's circumcised, that will be the end of him and us too."

Again the holding of my hand—"My child, how we understand you now." And then in came her husband, the same guy who told me the problems and suffering were just for Czech Jews because they're Communists. He hugged me

to his chest, patted my head and he said, "Oh my God, my girl—we can now understand what you were going through, what you went through all those years. Did you hear anything about your parents?" I shook my head in tears and I said no. I said, "Look, forgive me, but I didn't mean to barge in. I don't want to hurt you. It's just that at Susan's tears and urging I came in to find out how Gary is."

They opened the door and there was Gary. First they pulled away a bookcase. The bookcase closed the door, and Gary was there with a woman, an older woman in white. She was probably a nurse. And he was sleeping. All I did was touch his hands. It was a very, very sad sight. Of course in this and every tragedy, I didn't see just Gary Behrend, I saw my brothers. Somehow they were all connected.

So I gave them the few first—aid things and they were really grateful. They didn't need them right then, but they said they might need them later and they asked me to come back—which surprised me. And Mr. Behrend said, "Why are you surprised that we ask you to come back? You're one of us now." I said, "Because I don't want to hurt you. I am afraid that somebody will recognize me here." He said, "The hell with the world, we have nothing to lose. We are in your boat and in your shoes. You told us all this—you have nothing to lose. And that's why we have nothing to lose, either, and I beg you to come back to visit anytime you can. Just be careful the Jew—haters shouldn't see you. The janitor shouldn't see you either, because she will be suspicious."

So I promised them, and I just asked if I could help them—because I still had a half hour—if I could help them with something. And they didn't want me to help them with

nothing. And I picked up and I left, and I walked so slow. I don't know if my feet hurt at all—they were so heavy I just could hardly walk back. But I made it, I made it before curfew. That was before six o'clock. After six nobody could walk out.

Poor Susan. She was standing on the steps and waiting for me, biting her nails. And she said, "Hurry up, come in. They taking a count here and you must be in here. And later you tell me about Gary."

So we ran in. They took a count, and like every evening everybody got a piece of bread ration. And I was really not hungry. I said to Susan, "Please take it and give it to some children." She said, "But you cannot starve." I said, "No I'm not gonna starve." So she took the bread, and I don't know who she gave it to. And then we both went down to the basement. It wasn't an air raid, but the basement wasn't that crowded and I could talk. And I told her everything about Gary, that I didn't know if he was really sleeping or whatever. She said she thought he was in a coma and asked, "When is this goddam war gonna come to an end?" I mean, Budapest was surrounded. There was no water already; there was water rationing.

And this was the way we were sitting and talking for an hour, and I felt like she was my sister and she felt the same. Then her mother came downstairs with two cups of tea which reminded me of my own mother. And that tea tasted ever so delicious. We drank it maybe for two hours, like we would savor the best meal in the world. And it was. It's not always what you eat but how you eat it and who gives it to you.

And of course I felt better, I really felt better in that Swedish house because the people who were there were my

Jewish people. Not all of them understood the hell we went through, but I didn't mind, I didn't care, and I didn't try to tell nobody anything. But I heard many stories. I heard so many stories that my hair would stand up. Some said that their best friends came in and took everything out of the house, and then reported them. Others were beaten up by their neighbors. Familiar, familiar stories. Jasina all over. But I sat and listened, I sat and listened like my grandfather used to read stories to me. And that's how I used to fall asleep, and I really slept.

For a long time, I didn't realize that my legs were swollen. My legs were terribly swollen from the cold after I left the bombed-out houses. Even though I thought, "I'm a big shot," there still remained awful scars on my legs. And there was a nurse—I don't know who tipped her off; I have a feeling Susan's mother—and she once came in to the little corner where I was sitting. I was sitting all by myself with thoughts, both back in Jasina and with Gary. And she said, "Okay, let me see your legs." I said, "Why? Let me see your legs."

"Smart aleck. Come on," she said, "let me see your legs and stop bullshitting." So I showed her my legs. She said that I had to be admitted to the hospital. I said, "Which hospital? I'm not going to no hospital." She said, "Okay, we can maybe place you in the first—aid room here." I said, "No, I'm not even going to take a bath from first—aid. With all the bombs you have plenty of injured people here. I'm not that sick, I'm fine." "Okay," she said, "then we gonna try to give you some bandages. You should bandage your legs. A young girl like you shouldn't have swollen legs." I said, "Bullshit. It doesn't mean nothing."

So she gave me bandages and she put them on my legs—it felt better. So I calmed down. Didn't play big shot, and I used to bandage my own feet which helped for a while. But the place to sleep was so small—it was like two chairs. Sometimes when my feet slid down at night they got swollen even more. So when I found a way to keep my feet up—tip over chair and lay down on the floor—I was covered with roaches. So that wasn't such a good thing, but that's all minor.

Every early morning when we would wake up and we would hear screams on the street—knowing from the screams that those are the heroes that didn't go to the front to fight for their fatherland, but were instead quickly moving fast a few leftover Jews through the certain hell—holes in Austria or in Hungary (Auschwitz was over by that time). So many times I couldn't even look out the window, but once Susan yelled, "Come and see something, come and see something! They are fighting among themselves." When I came to the window I saw three Nazi officers hitting three Hungarian Fascists. They were hitting each other; they were fighting. It was a beautiful circus. There it was: Budapest had been surrounded for three and a half months, and now the Hungarian Fascists were fighting with the German Nazis. I said, "Susan, let's open the window. I want to see." She said, "No, let's not open the window on the third floor. Let's go downstairs and open the door ajar a little bit, and we will find out what they fighting for."

So we ran down, and we heard them—we heard them. She didn't know German, but I did. And the Germans said, "You dirty Hungarians, you gonna give us this gold. And this money belongs to us and not to you." And the Hungarians

said, "We took this from the Jews and these are Hungarian Jews, so this belongs to us." And they cursed each other and hit each other. And there was a box that was probably full of jewelry and gold because according to their wording this is what they fought for.

In the meantime, somebody came around—a civilian—and grabbed the box and ran away. And the Nazis started shooting until they shot each other. Well, that was the best holiday, seeing two German Nazis and two Hungarian Nazis all dead by their own hands. What a satisfaction, what a great thing it was. Susan and I giggled. We giggled hysterically, and somebody—the supervisor of the house—asked us if we wanted to go into first-aid, that we must be sick, because who can laugh so much. And Susan said, "No." Her Hungarian of course was perfect, and she said, "No, no, we just saw a beautiful theater and we are fine, believe me, and just let us go."

So we went into the tiny room where there were three families: Susan's parents and six more people. Six more people, like two sets of parents and two children. And Susan pulled her mother aside: a very cute little woman, but she looked a hundred years old-yet she was maybe forty-two, just like my own mother. And she started to whisper in her mother's ear, and her mother started kissing her, and boy was I jealous. But I had a great satisfaction. Then Susan's mother stood in the middle of the room and she said, "My dear friends, I have something to tell you. My two daughters (Me?! I'm considered her daughter! Well, it's kind of nice) just came with this: they were in the door peeping out when they saw two Hungarian Nazis—two Hungarian Fascists and two German Nazis fighting. And you know what the end

was? They all killed each other! They all shot each other! Isn't that great news?!"

So one man there, he said, "Yeah, it's about time they should have a real war instead of just war against the Jews, the unarmed Jews. So at least now they are heroes, at least these four guys are like heroes because they shot each other!"

Chapter Eleven

WELL, THE BOMBING STOPPED a little bit, but the shooting was constant day and night, day and night. And we were asked to go down into the basement, and still there was talk about Raoul Wallenberg. Someone said, "Don't you know? He is a Swedish young man who bought up all these houses and who runs around and pulls people out of the lines, pulls them from the trains, from everywhere, just to save them. How in the world did you get here—that you don't know?" I said, "Just you said now. I was dragged in a group. I don't know where, and I really don't even remember how they got me—if I walked in a daze or they caught me in a bombed—out house—I don't know. And when they dragged me and the air raid came, suddenly somebody pulled me and here I am." He said, "You are one of the lucky ones." I said, "Yeah, how can I be so lucky? I don't know where my parents are. I had a brother in Budapest. He both took off for Jasina, and I don't know." The man said, "Don't be silly. Jasina was occupied by the Russians a long time ago." I said, "Not fast enough to save my family, unfortunately, not fast enough."

And the soldiers were shooting, they were constantly shooting and the building was shaking. I loved it, I loved it.

I'd rather be in the war than in fear stashed away in any hole. I just sometimes fantasized how I could be in the army, or anything. Just to be able to shoot back.

So, as we were sitting and the shooting was unbelievable, suddenly there was calm. Suddenly there was calm, and that was already like the very beginning of January. It was calm, which scared the others, but not me. I had nothing to lose anymore. I didn't care, I really didn't care. But it scared the people, especially the men who were in the war and who were familiar with soldiers' behavior.

Then during the few weeks in January when it was really calm, somebody came in. They said that they got half of Budapest, the Russians got half of Budapest. But not our part, because a few German bastards kept our part of Budapest still occupied.

That was like around January 16th or 17th, 1945. On January 20th, very early in the morning, I heard running through the building—not only me—we all heard running through the building and Russian, people talking Russian. Of course I understood Russian from school, and I said to the people I was in the room with, "This is a Russian talking." Then one of our group told me, "Now you be our translator. We have to explain to him what we are and what we are about." I said, "Okay."

So when we went out, we went out in the hallway—about three men, three women of different ages, and me. And we heard them yelling in Russian, "Who are you? Who are you?" I said to one of them, "Well, we were prisoners here."

"But you don't look like prisoners."

I said to him, "Well then," I said to him, "we are Jews."

But he was a Mongolian, a Mongolian lieutenant, with two Mongolian soldiers. He really had no idea what I was talking to him about being Jewish. Then he ran out again and he brought in another man—he was a captain. And the captain said to me, "What did you just say—what are you?" I said, "We are Jewish." He said, "Come on, who you gonna fool? Everybody would like—wherever we come everybody claims they are Jewish. We know where the Jews are, we know what you bastards did with the Jews. And we gonna pay you right back."

So I said to him, "Look, you're an intelligent man. Believe me we are Jewish. We suffered through the Nazis plenty." He disappeared and he came back, and he called me downstairs and he wanted everybody else to disappear. But I held onto the guy. I was really afraid—it was the first time in my life I had been afraid for a long time. He said, "Okay, sit down. If you Jewish—read this." It was a Siddur, so I read it. He said, "Really?" Then he started talking to me in Yiddish. He said, "Okay, make a brocha over the broit." So I did. Then his eyes like—his eyes filled with tears, and he said, "If you're not fooling me that you're Jewish, then tell me how you lived through." I said to him, "Look, it's a long story to tell how we lived through, but here we are. These are all Jews."

"But how come you speak Russian? Of course, it's not that bad Russian, but it's not that good." I said, "Look, I was born in Czechoslovakia, and here I am—through certain circumstances, here I am. I speak Russian." He said, "Okay, you come with me. You're going to have to translate with us." I said to him, "Look, you're going to laugh, but I was never scared before and yet I'm somehow scared of you." He said,

"Okay, take any of your friends here and take them with you. Let them volunteer—but you get dragged into this."

So I said to Susan, "Listen, Susan. Take your mother, father, and you, and let's go. You just be there. I'm gonna pretend that I don't know Hungarian (but by that time I did know perfect Hungarian) and we gonna translate." And the Russian agreed, and he took us in a truck to the other side of Budapest, which had already been occupied for six weeks. There was an office, and there was this big, tall guy who was a general. And he said in Russian, "Okay, Yakov, what are you dragging in here?" He said, "I'm dragging in a few Jews."

"Oh come on. The Jews? Didn't you see the skeletons in the ghetto? That's where the Jews are." Yakov said, "No, she claims she is Jewish and I tend to believe her. Besides she was born in Czechoslovakia."

"Hooray, hooray, hooray—are you hungry people?" I didn't answer, but soon enough there were four big plates of borscht, which is a very thick beet soup, and bread, a big, long bread. My God, I suddenly felt hungry. For a long time I hadn't felt hungry. Suddenly I felt hungry, and I probably ate like a wild animal, because before I even finished, and before Susan's parents finished they refilled our deep dishes and we ate like there was no end to our appetites.

Then he said to me, "Okay, you do know Russian." I said, "I really don't know it that good, but I'm able to understand."

"Do you know German?"

I said, "Yes."

"Do you know Hungarian?"

I said "Well, Susan and her parents know," because I didn't want to let go of them.

So we were there and they brought in some Nazis. And the general told me, "Ask them who they are and what they are and what rank they have." And they claimed that they were forced to fight against the Russians, etc., etc. Of course I translated what I wanted to translate. And once this general didn't even ask the question; instead I asked them, "So you're the big hero. How come you didn't fight against your enemies, supposedly the Russians, but you dragged Jews?" Oh, he started shivering, "I didn't." I said, "I saw you drag the Jews." So he covered his head with his coat and started crying. And the general said, "Now what'd you ask them?" I told him what I asked them. And he was laughing, he said, "You did the right thing."

"Okay," he said, "take them home, but I want her back tomorrow because I'm going to have a whole group here. Take them home, give them bread, and also give them some cans."

We got a whole bag of bread and we got some canned food, and we came back to the Swedish house and started to divide it—not me, Susan's parents. I didn't have patience for that or anything.

There was still constant shooting, since the whole of Budapest wasn't free yet. And they did come to pick me up every day with the truck. By that time I wasn't really scared and I went by myself because my Hungarian was pretty good, and German and Russian. And they just couldn't believe how such a young girl could make her tongue twist so fast. I said, "It's all a necessity of life, it's all a necessity of life."

Then there was the chauffeur, the general's chauffeur. His name was Misha, and he was Jewish. And I had many, many

good talks with him. And he told me what he saw, and he said how terrible it was. And we were together a couple of months. In the meantime they spotted my swollen legs, and they sent me to the hospital in their corps. It was a Russian hospital, like an army hospital. They gave me all kinds of medications and they kept me until my legs weren't quite as swollen anymore.

Of course every day in the hospital I would have to translate—either for the hospital or for the army. Then after two weeks of being in the hospital, Misha and I went with two engineers to the Danube. The bridge under the Danube was broken. And they were trying to fix it. And suddenly I started screaming and yelling and I saw Yanosh with Susan's sister. I started screaming and yelling, I said, "My God!"— the Russians were dragging them somewhere! I said, "My God, where do they drag them? These are my friends!" And Misha said, "Who's your friends? They are Fascists." I said, "No, they are not Fascists."

"Oh yeah, oh yeah—their own parents told us that they are Fascists."

I said, "They are not Fascists, they are my friends. Please, they are both Jewish—let them go."

So we walked over to them—Misha, he helped me a lot—and he said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah, and don't try to test them like you tested me—that if I'm Jewish I can read Yiddish. They don't know Yiddish, but they're Jewish.

Then she cried. Susan's sister cried terribly. Of course Yanosh didn't remember me. He never paid attention to who I was or what I looked like. And I told her where her parents were. And I said to Misha, "Please, take us back because the

parents that helped you translate Hungarian, they are this girl's parents."

So we took them back and there was a happy reunion. The happiness of Susan and her parents was unbelievable. And again I was jealous, happy and jealous. I just figured, and hoped against hope, that maybe I could be reunited with my family like this. And it was hurting, it was hurting so much that Susan pulled me away and started to walk with me around the block and tell me all kinds of stories. I asked her about Gary and she said she was still afraid to go to see Gary. I said, "Fine, Susan. You want to go?" She said, "Yes." And I turned around to Misha—he was always hovering around me because the Russians couldn't get a translator, especially for free—for soup and bread. Well, to them it was free; to me it was worth a million. I said, "Misha, get me some food, please. We have to go see a sick boy. He's very sick." And he said, "Are you working for the whole world or are you working for yourself?" I said, "If you help me find my parents or anyone from my family, I work for myself. Until then—the whole world is my family."

He was really a deep, religious young man and very kind. And in a few minutes I had bread, I had butter, I had sugar! And when Susan saw that, I said, "Susan, keep half for your parents and let's take half to Gary's parents." She said, "No, we will make it. Let's take all of it to Gary." And we did. Misha drove us there with the truck. And on the way we were talking: if we should take Misha up or if we should have him wait downstairs. I said the only way I would like to take him up was if Yanosh Genderhausen's parents would

see us—and we'd scare the shit out of them. And she was a very refined, quiet girl. She said, "No, let's wait."

And we ran up through the back steps—imagine—still through the back steps. The Russians occupy almost the whole of Budapest—and still we go through the back steps with these heavy packages and we knocked on the door. And Gary's father came to the door, and when he saw us he almost fainted. He saw us with these packages—he almost fainted. And he let us in, and Susan kissed him and she said, "Please, can I see Gary?" He said, "Yes...can you people help us get him into the hospital?" I said, "By all means, yes." Then he and his wife sat down and cried, they cried so much that we all cried together.

I said, "You must get him into the hospital." Mrs. Behrend said, "Please, can you help us? We are so helpless it's unbelievable." I said, "Where are Doctor and Mrs. Rosenock?" She said, "That part, would you believe, is still occupied. That part there is still fighting going on, but I hope that they will survive." And I said, "I know they will survive. Dr. Rosenock must survive."

So I ran down to Misha. I said, "There is a very sick boy here. Can we get a first-aid ambulance to get him to the hospital?" He said, "What else you want next—what you want next from me?" I said, "Please, have a heart, use your good heart. Please do." He said, "Who the hell is this? I hope it's not your boyfriend." I said, "Don't worry if it's my boyfriend. You told me you have two children, you're married, so you have nothing to worry about." He said, "But the general has his eyes on you." I said, "Baloney to the general." Then he said, "Hop in the truck with me, and we gonna get an ambulance."

I said, "Wait." I said, "Misha, let's go up. You come up with me and we gonna show the people who you are and we tell them that we gonna get an ambulance."

We walked up through the front steps, and all I hoped was to see the Genderhausens—Yanosh's parents. We didn't. And I said to Mrs. Behrend, "Here, this is my friend. He's a very good person, he's Jewish, and will get an ambulance—we must get Gary to the hospital." And she kissed me again. She even kissed him, and he couldn't understand what was going on, but he listened to me. He said, "You became like my dictator." I said, "So what?"

So we ran to the hospital, the same military hospital where they helped me, where they put me on my feet. And we got an ambulance. And I begged them to let his mother come with me, and they did, they really did.

So his mother and I were sitting in the ambulance and Misha followed us. I think he was watching me more than anybody. And then we took Gary to this hospital, and they started to rebandage him. And he was infected from the wound. It had been many months, and the treatment hadn't been so good.

They started to give him penicillin against the infection. And I don't know what else they gave him because I had a job to keep his mother—to really keep her calm. She was broken, and I didn't blame her. And constantly she said, "Now, my child, we understand what you were going through, and what you went through. My God, we were really rough—harsh with you." I said, "Let's forget this. Let's just make Gary well. I feel like Gary's my own brother." And she said, "He felt the same thing about you, and look at what happened. Look

what happened—Gary didn't even tell Yanosh that his parents are converted Jews. I guess his girlfriend told him. And then Mr. Genderhausen goes and shoots."

So the night set in and Gary still wasn't talking. He was opening his eyes, and he smiled a bit. He smiled and shook my hand, and he smiled to his mother which made her feel good. And Misha informed us that this was a military hospital; we couldn't stay there. I said to him, "Misha, not even me?" He said, "Who the hell are you? Not even you." I said, "Didn't anybody need a translator here for the night?" He said, "Let's take Gary's mother home." We did, and I promised I was gonna try to stay in the hospital somehow that night.

And then Misha wanted to take me home and I said, "No, take me back to the hospital." And when he took me to the hospital, the entrance, I went to the woman who was there checking everybody's papers and I said, "You have a translator here? I mean, do you need a translator?" And she said, "Well, what do you talk? You speak German?" I said, "Yeah."

"Oh absolutely, we need a translator."

Misha gave me that mean look, that mean look, and then he told me, "Your mouth and your tongue is gonna create a lot of trouble for you." I said, "Why? You know why I want to be in the hospital. I have to look after Gary." He said, "Who's Gary to you?" I said, "Well, you know I have brothers, so make—believe it's my brother."

And I stayed there all night. They didn't let me close to him, but I saw how they bandaged him, and I saw the good care they gave him. And he started to talk, and he said, "What happened? Why am I here? Did a bomb fall on me...or

why?" I said, "Gary, I don't know." In the meantime the nurse pushed me out. She said, "You must not talk to him, you must give him peace."

Then it was like four A.M. and I said to him, "Gary, look, they're taking care of you, and everything will be okay. I have to go, I really have to go." And he asked me about his parents. I said, "They're all okay." And I asked him if he wanted Susan to come. He said, "Do I ever want Susan to come! That's my only hope—to see her."

So I waited until six o'clock, six in the morning, and the Russians were eating again hot borscht and bread. And that was delicious for breakfast. And without even asking they gave me some, and I really had a ball. I ate it, I ate it like mad. At six o'clock Misha came to the hospital, and I said to him, "Misha, one more favor—please." He said, "No—nyet—no more. You're going to go to work if you want to get bread for your family. You're going to go to work or you won't get nothing. Don't forget we can arrest you and deport you to Siberia." I said, "Yeah, sure, I believe it." Then he said, "Okay, what's the favor?" I said, "I want to get Susan. See that wounded boy? That's Susan's boyfriend."

"Oh, okay, I believe you," and we went and we got Susan and her parents and took them to the hospital. And of course they were very glad to see each other, and I begged the nurse to let her stay—that this was his girlfriend and would she just help. And they did let her stay, they did let her stay, but they told her parents to go home. So we dropped her parents off, and we headed toward the Kommandantura—the Russian office—again. But we didn't get there because the shooting was so terrible—still from the other side. I said, "What takes

you so long to occupy Budapest?" Misha said, "We're not in a hurry—we want to kill the cowards. The cowards were dragging Jews, but they were too cowardly to fight against us, so we gonna kill them." I said, "Yeah, and you're killing the few remaining Jews." He said, "There are no more Jews in Budapest." I said, "Yeah, there are. In fact, the people who really saved me...there is a doctor and his wife hiding in a hospital." He said, "Which? In Saint Mary's Hospital?"

So Misha told me that that hospital was only occupied very early in the morning. He said, "If the general gives us permission I'm gonna go and I'm gonna try to get your friends out. You tell me those are the kind of people they are, so we definitely have to get them out." I said, "Yeah, those are the best people I have met, and because of them I'm here—you know that."

So we went to the general, and he had a few Germans lined up there. And I translated. And then Misha asked him. And the general said, "Why doesn't she ask me? Always you talk for her. She knows how to talk." I said to him, "Listen, there are my friends in this hospital. They worked."

"Are they Jewish?"

"I said, "Yeah."

"Do they know how to read Jewish? They have to prove it because in that hospital—it's a Nazi hospital, you know."

I said, "Does he ever know how to read. He was praying every day."

So we sat in the truck. He gave Misha two hours. He said, "Okay, you can take them out of there and take them wherever she wants to, but don't let her push you around too much. And then come back."

So we got to the hospital, and there were a few Russian Mongols outside. They were giggling and laughing, and Misha asked them, like in front of me, why there were laughing. And well, they said, "We having a good time with the nuns in there." Then Misha said, "Look, walk me in there," because Misha didn't have any arms. He was almost like a civilian, he was a chauffeur. "Walk me in there, we have to take out some people."

One of the Mongols said, "Are you kidding? There is so much fun in that hospital—what with the nuns. We cannot take you in there. Come back in an hour. Come back in an hour, after I have my fun, then you come back and not 'til then." So I look at Misha and he looked at me. He said, "Listen, let's not force the issue. Let's go back to the office. Maybe the general has some more work for you, and then we gonna come back and get your friends. After all, it just was freed this morning." So we went back.

Around five in the afternoon he took me back to the hospital, and we had to go around calling Dr. Rosenock. Of course I didn't know the name he used there. No Dr. Rosenock answered, but then I saw the kind doctor who always looked at me, who once gave me some money. And I ran over to him and I said, "Where is Dr. Rosenock and his wife?" And he said, "Well, who are you?" I said, "Don't you remember me? You were the one who looked after me all the time and you are the one who gave me money. And I knew you were sent by Dr. Rosenock." He said, "Oh my God, girl—you look horrible. How come you don't walk straight and all?" I said, "Well, my legs are still swollen. Never mind that—let me see the doctor and his wife."

So he took me into a very deep place, and they were still hiding there. The kind man said, "But it's not safe to get out yet, it's not safe." I said, "It is safe with us." And Misha wanted to know every word that I talked with him, like they considered me still a spy. So I told him every word.

When Dr. Rosenock saw me with this Misha he got speechless. He said, "My child, thank God I see you." He right away put on his tallis and he started to pray, "Thank God I see you. I didn't think I will see you. How is our daughter and son-in-law?" I said, "They are all okay, all okay." I keep saying, "All okay" with a big lie, with a big, red face. I said, "Look, let me take you there." And the doctor's wife still believed that there were Fascists around there, they shouldn't go there because they gonna hurt their daughter and they might be arrested. I said, "No, that part is occupied by the Russians. It's just the part of the hospital that was freed only this morning." She said, "Are you sure, my child, are you sure?" I said, "Yes. You know I wouldn't mislead you. All the things you did for me—I wouldn't mislead you."

"Well, who is that young fellow?"

"He is from Kommandantura—which is the Russian office—and I've been translating, and I asked him to come here for you. He's Misha. He's a chauffeur for the general, and he is Jewish," I told her in Hungarian."

They packed together, and they asked me if they could take this doctor with them. I said, "Of course. I remember him looking after me and pushing money, and I know you were the ones who sent it."

So we put Mrs. Rosenock in the front next to Misha. And Dr. Rosenock, and the other doctor and me, we were sitting

in the back. And of course they wanted to know everything. I said, "Look, I am very tired. I really cannot talk too much. Besides, we have to get back before six. We have to get back in the buildings because we cannot walk at night—there is martial law. It's war, it's still war, and the shooting still criss-crossed back and forth, back and forth."

Then Misha stopped at the Kommandantura, the office where I work, and he said, "Well, don't you want some food for them? Hop down. Move your ass fast—let's get them some food."

And we went in, and the general was already furious, and he said, "I want to see if you don't lie. I want to see the man. I want to see the man who you run to get out so fast." I said, "Fine, come and see him." And Misha pulled me, he said, "Don't say he's a doctor because they gonna take him." "Okay," I said, "Okay."

So he ran out, and he shook hands with the two doctors, and he gave Mrs. Rosenock a kiss, and he said, "Well, she didn't lie. Are they your parents?" I said, "Yeah, I just wish. No, they are not my parents."

So we took them some rice, and there was some bread. There was also some milk—not much—but whatever. And I gave it to Mrs. Rosenock, and she couldn't believe her eyes. She said, "Now my child, where did you get this from?" I said, "Misha gave it to me."

And we took them to their daughter. Of course Gary wasn't home; he was still in the hospital. And the reunion is impossible to describe. Again, I was frozen. My fantasies went back to Jasina: If somebody would bring me at least one person from my family I don't know what I would do. While

they were kissing and hugging I said good-bye to them and I had to run.

And Misha took me still to the Swedish house. And he said he's going to pick me up in the morning again because there is a new transport of Hungarian Fascists to translate. And he said, "Just how do you translate? How does your tongue twist so fast from German to Hungarian to Russian? What else do you know?" Then I started talking to him in Yiddish, and from then on we always talked Yiddish—always.

And he knew more horror stories than I do. He knew more. I said, "Misha, did you pass through Jasina?" He said, "No. We surrounded it and the they pulled us back." I said, "When you, when they pulled back that's when they grabbed my parents, that's when they grabbed my parents, that's when they schlepped them to the ghetto, and then they probably schlepped them to Auschwitz." And he cried, and I cried. And I was so self-centered I didn't even ask him about his family. I knew he was married, he had two small children.

So for the next few days I would translate and get food enough for Susan's family, get food enough for Dr. Rosenock and his family. Well, this is what I worked for, for the food, and I translated. The general used to take me to the Danube again because they were building the bridge and I was translating there. And I was seeing the tragedy again; more Jewish bodies, more and more they pulled out 'til I got so sick once I passed out. I couldn't...I held up because I had to hold up, but finally I didn't feel I had to hold up any more. And I just started to be a human being, and I started feeling again—which wasn't a good thing for me.

So it passed about three, four months, and I said to Misha, "I want to go to Jasina, I want to go to—." He said, "Don't go, nobody's there." I said, "I have to go."

Chapter Twelve

THEN I TOOK THE TRAIN to go to Jasina, and all the way in the train I was sweating, I was sweating and my mouth was dry. My heart was beating a thousand beats a second, and I didn't know what to do. Suddenly, I got panicky, and I got off in Sighet. Sighet was the city from where my brother married a girl and my sister was engaged.

I got off there and walked around. This was a beautiful Romanian city. And the microphones—there was music always on the streets in Sighet—always. They had sidewalk cafes. I stopped and I sat down—just maybe somebody would come over and I could talk. Nobody came over, so I was just sitting and drinking a soda. And I didn't know Romanian, I didn't understand it, and they hated the Hungarian talk. So I really didn't talk to anybody. Suddenly the music stopped and they announced at that time that President Roosevelt had died. It really had no meaning to me one way or another way. I was still bitter why America didn't bomb Auschwitz ... Mathausen ... Bergen-Belsen ... Teresenstadt ... Treblinka ...and all this. Why they bombed Budapest? They bombed Budapest residential areas—not military at all—yet they couldn't find their way to bomb the

concentration camps, the crematoriums. So if Roosevelt died or lived it didn't mean a darned thing to me, absolutely nothing.

And I went to the station again, just to get on the train and go to Jasina. Suddenly, the panic set in, and I didn't have much money on me. So I just bought a ticket back to Budapest. And when I came to the Swedish house, Susan and her parents weren't there anymore. But I was still sleeping over because in the morning Misha picked me up to translate again. But Susan came that afternoon to the office. And she told me where they had moved back to—their little apartment. And I said, "Did you find your sister already?" She said, "Yes, my sister is fine, but nobody must know where they are, my sister and Yanosh, because his parents would kill them both." I said, "Even now, even with the war ended?" She said, "Yes. Even now, even with the war ended, they threatened them."

So I asked her if she knows where they are. She said yes, she and her parents know, but they have to be in hiding.

So we parted, and I told Susan to come over every day into the office to get some food, and she did. And she asked me to come to their house and stay, but I said, "No, I want to still go back to Jasina. And I'm just going to stay in that Swedish house for a while and then (Czechoslovakia wasn't free yet) I don't know. I'll go to Jasina and then I will know. I hope I will find somebody from my family. I'm busy, Susan. I don't know what to do."

But daily, every she would come for the food, and I also sent food back to Dr. Rosenock. I would sort of divide it. And once Dr. Rosenock asked Susan to tell me I should come over. And when I did, he asked me if I heard something about my

family. He told me that he would like me to come live with them. I thanked him and I said, "You know that I would not be able to stay in Budapest. There is still too much bloodshed. I also would not be able to stay in Jasina anymore because the memories are terrible. I just wanted to go and take a look and find out if somebody was left." So he said, "My child, you cannot go back to Czechoslovakia; it's not free. So what do you want to do?" I said, "I don't know, I really don't know." And again I tried to go on the train to Jasina, and I didn't even get as far as Sighet. I just had to turn around halfway, and I said, "I can't. I just can't. I'm going to try to find people and find if anybody's alive from my family, but I can't go back there."

So when I got back to Budapest I saw a woman from Jasina. I went to the refugees lined up for food—and I asked her and she said, "Yes, your sister is alive, your oldest sister. She is in Sweden.

"How about the rest?"

She said she doubted it very much. She had heard a rumor that my two younger brothers, they held my father's hand, and that's the way they took them into the crematorium. My mother apparently went with my little sister, and Dr. Mengele—that was the butcher of Auschwitz—grabbed my little sister and took her away, and my mother went to the crematorium by herself.

So there it was: I had my news—or at least the most heartbreaking rumor. And I realized why I could not go to Jasina.

One day after Misha took me home, he said, "Come on, we gonna go to the restaurant. Here is a restaurant open. I have to talk to you." I said, "Why can't you talk to me here?"

He said, "I can't because the truck might be wired or whatever. We have to go to the restaurant."

Misha told me—that was around April 1945—Misha told me, "My dear kid, you have to disappear. The general has big plans for you." He said, "You are extremely talented. He's going to take you to Moscow, send you to the university because you are so talented in languages. Just what Russia needs. And anyway, the part you come from will belong to Russia." I knocked on the table, I said, "Misha, you're a liar. The part I come from will belong to Russia—how come?" He said, "Yes, yes. That was in Yalta. It was already signed over. Didn't you read the papers?" I laughed in his face, "Papers? I haven't seen a paper in years. What am I going to read—the Fascist papers? I heard it enough." He said, "Ilana, you must disappear. You don't want to go to Russia." I said, "Why, what's so bad to go to Russia?" He said, "There is no place for you. It's a dictatorship, and you don't want to go to Russia. GET LOST! GET LOST! I'm going to come to pick you up and I'm not going to find you anymore." I said, "Where can I get lost? I cannot go back to Jasina, Czechoslovakia, where I want to go, where I planned to finish my schooling, or where I planned to go before the war—it is not free yet." He said, "Pretty soon. Pretty soon. I think in another month—it will belong to Russia. You must get lost."

So I worked for the Kommandantura yet a few weeks, and the general invited me to dinner, and there were other high officials. There were all the engineers that I had translated for when they built the bridge on the Danube. And they all agreed about my great talent. They all agreed that I should sign the paper saying that I wanted to join and go to Moscow

University. The government would pick up all the bills. I had nothing to worry about; I would get a stipend and all. And I thanked them, and I told them in my naive way, I said, "I'm not ready to go anywhere yet. I cannot concentrate on studies now. I have to find my family first, or find out if the story I heard is true."

He said, "Well, look for awhile for your family, and by the end of May we will take you back and they will prepare you, because your reading and writing isn't so good. And you will be a great asset to the motherland, to the Soviet Union."

"Great asset," I thought to myself and kept quiet...I remembered what Misha had told me: "You must disappear."

Well, in a few days nobody came to pick me up and I was wondering why. So after a few days, I just walked over to see Dr. Rosenock. And he cried and cried, and he went to see his grandson Gary in the hospital—where they gave him pretty good treatments. But he told me he would like to take him out now and place him in the hospital he used to work for—which was an excellent Jewish hospital—because although the Russians did a lot for him, he doubted if the Russian military doctors really could help him.

So I said to him, "Okay, let's go to the hospital. First arrange it with the other hospital, then let's go to the Russian hospital. We're going to try to sign him out." But they wouldn't sign him up without the permission of the general that I worked for, because he got him in there in the first place. So I went to the Kommandantura and they all looked at me like I was a spy—they looked at me like I was terrible. I said, "I just want to speak to the general."

And I waited a while, and the general came out. He greeted me and said, "Okay, come in." And that was maybe five, six days after they hadn't sent for me. And he said, "I thought you left with Misha."

I said, "Left with Misha? Where is Misha—what happened to Misha?" He said, "Misha disappeared. He absolutely disappeared. Do you know where he is?" I said, "No, I have no idea—maybe he's sick or something." He said, "No, he's not sick. He was a spy, he disappeared, and now we are suspicious that you're a spy too."

I said, "Why are you so suspicious that I'm a spy? I'm too stupid to be a spy." He said, "No, you were connected with Misha, and I know what he talked you into and all that." I said, "Look, I didn't really come here to look for or talk about Misha. I came here with this man; his grandson is in the hospital. They wouldn't let him go until you sign. Please sign it." And I was afraid to say this man was a doctor because they would have kept him there—they needed doctors. I said, "Please sign it. Let them take him to another hospital because he doesn't know Russian; he needs a translator constantly..."

So, he was mad but he signed it. And we went to the hospital and got him out, but I couldn't get an ambulance. I had to go back to the general and beg him again. He said, "Okay, I get you an ambulance if you promise me you get here to work some tomorrow." I said, "Yes, I promise I'll get to work."

So he gave me an ambulance. We took Gary to another hospital. And my God, that poor Gary was yelling. His grandfather, I thought his grandfather was going to die right then and there. He said, "Surely, the war doesn't avoid nobody, doesn't avoid nobody—not even my innocent grandson."

So I kept quiet and we took him to the hospital, and we left him there. And his grandfather didn't want to go home; he wanted to stay, because obviously Gary was dying. And I said it's a good idea he should stay. And he said, "How are you going to get home, my child? There is army and military all over." I said, "Don't worry, I'll get home somehow."

And when I walked out, I thought the ambulance would give me a ride but they had already left. So I tried to run home, which was still the Swedish house. The Swedish flag was gone; it was down. Most people went home—there were just a few left—like me—that had nowhere to go...

And I went into this room where there had been three families, but now it was empty, and I felt such an empty feeling. But I was terribly tired and I fell asleep.

In the morning the truck came for me with another driver: Square—looking, Siberian, with stern—looking eyes—it wasn't the comforting Misha anymore. And I said to him, "Who sent for me?" He said, "You know who sent for you—the general. We have some soldiers and he wants you to translate."

And I didn't say anything; I was sitting frozen. And when I came in there the general asked me if I made up my mind, because soon they wanted to take me to Moscow—and if Misha told me anything. I said, "No, Misha didn't tell me anything." And he said, "Did you make up your mind? You tell me."

...Austria, and in Germany, and even on the streets of Budapest—the Nazis, the Fascists, managed to kill each other pretty good. Once when I was walking on the street I saw they were hanging two men, and the people, the faces who

were hanging them looked very familiar. Not long ago they were wearing the German emblem on their arms, and now they were suddenly hanging their own kind. If that wasn't enough, that they hang their own kind—I don't know who they were—people started beating them with sticks after they were hung. Really, I didn't know if I wouldn't rather be living in a jungle. It probably was the same people who were beating and killing the Jews.

It was chaos, and there was no food in Budapest. And there were constant skeletons in the ghetto. I used to walk by—just maybe I could get a glimpse of some people that I knew. But I never saw anybody after that. I also was amazed at the English and American journalists, how they photographed, they made pictures of the skeletons without even flinching. Professional journalists—really. They would have liked to ask questions, but if the answer wasn't to their liking they didn't question anymore.

When they started questioning me I asked them why didn't the United States or England bomb Auschwitz and the other concentration camps? They looked at me like I had come from another world. So they never interviewed me. They just didn't get the answer they would have liked to get from me, because I had a few questions of my own.

It was hard to understand, hard to understand for me, how the people could go back. Of course maybe they weren't so heartbroken. But back to live normally so fast? To arrange their apartments, to arrange everything? Maybe their families weren't broken up, so it was easier for them to bring everybody together. I really don't know.

I talked many times to Dr. Rosenock, and he told me I

should not stay in Europe. He said, "Stay as long as you need to, but then maybe you'll want to come with us to the United States." I told him that I wouldn't. I said, "I have to go back to Czechoslovakia as soon as it's free and try to find out about my family. Even maybe just finish high school." He said maybe it was a good idea, but I should not stay in Europe longer than necessary. Europe was rotted and bloody, and he had a son in New York who was a doctor, and he would go there.

I didn't go to Gary's funeral—just because I couldn't take funerals. It was heartbreaking to see his mother. And the way she looked at me—she looked at me with such guilt. Really the Behrends didn't do anything to me, except they didn't want to believe how bloody and how terrible war is. So I couldn't face them anymore. I couldn't help them, either, because I was running around looking for my own family.

Soon enough I found out for sure that everybody had been killed in Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen—except one of my sisters, who was sick in Sweden. That sort of left me nowhere. I also remembered the warning from Misha that I should never go to Russia, where I had no interest to go anyway.

There was a lot of snow and it was very cold in 1945, and the people really suffered. In the ghetto there were very few people left, and it was just amazing how they were helping each other. It was a big contrast between the way Jewish people in the ghetto helped each other, and how the International Nazis beat Hungarian Ukrainians, and how they fought to cut each other's eyes out. Sometimes for possessions, sometimes for the girls, but there was no shortage of fighting. Fighting, robbing.

Well, when I saw the Russians dragging off some of the Nazis they were still bedecked with their medals. They had such heavy medals on both sides—it looked like for every Jew they got a medal, for every Jew killed they got a medal. Where else could they have got so many medals? They didn't fight their so-called enemies. They didn't go to the front. They were big heroes for killing innocent Jewish people. And I watched them as they were marched off, to do some kind of a detention—watched their medals more than anything else. Once a Russian came over to me. He said, "How come you just watching? Here is a gun. Why don't you knock their blocks off? Don't wait thinking somebody else will do it for you. You have to do it yourself."

He was right, he was absolutely right. The more I go on living the more I see that he was right. You have to do it yourself—nobody will do it for you. And I sure had a lot of chances to do many things when I was translating, because they were lying. They were lying that they were forced into the army. That they didn't even know what went on. I wonder if with the Nazi training they were taught professional lying. But professional lying is their trait. Like once I saw a mother and a boy standing in line for bread, and she was talking German to him. I don't know for what reason I was standing behind them, or maybe I was looking for somebody, but she was telling him, "Don't worry. Soon enough the Germans will win, and we won't have to stay in line. You will be able to get in and to take everything you want. Especially from the Jews—you will be able to take everything you want." That's the kind of training the Germans gave their children: "You don't have to worry, you don't have to do

much. You will be able to take everything you want—including lives."

I didn't say much to this woman, but I went over and told the guard they shouldn't give her any bread. And the guard said, "We won't give any bread to anybody, because we don't have anything anymore. We just don't have—we're finished—we closed up the bakery." And I left.

And in Budapest many Russian armies still marched through. The war wasn't over in Budapest. Sometimes I still went back to what had been the Swedish house, and I still found some people there, but they were actually the people who originally lived there. And I would talk to them and ask them exactly who was behind this—saving the Jews. One of the ladies told me, "Well, didn't you hear? It's a young man, a Swedish young man by the name of Raoul Wallenberg." And then I told her the story of how I was saved. She said, "That was probably him. He used to run around, and from the groups that were dragged away from Budapest to concentration camps he would pull out as many as he could—especially when the air raids went on." I had heard so much about this remarkable young man that I asked her where he could be found, but she said she really didn't know.

She didn't know where the Swedish Consulate was now at all. It was just about two months after they had freed Budapest.

Anyway, I went out and found a policeman, and I said, "Where is the Swedish Embassy?" And he gave me the address, but he said, "It's not too safe to go there, so you be careful."

I went and I got Susan. I said, "Susan, let's go." She didn't

have an ID," but she said, "Okay, let's go." And we went to the embassy, and when we came in we were greeted with great friendliness by one of the staff. And I said, "We'd like to see Raoul Wallenberg." He said, "Hold on just a minute. Wait a few minutes and I will be able to give you information."

He went into another office and when he came out he said, "Count Wallenberg doesn't want to see nobody. You write to him." Well, I was a little bit shocked. Why wouldn't he want to see anybody if he saved so many people? Anyway, we left. We left and I talked to Susan. I said, "I have to get a young man. Maybe they think because we are two young girls that we run after him, and that's why he doesn't want to see anybody." She said, "That's a good idea." And I said, "Where do I get a young man, I don't know any. It doesn't seem that any of them were left alive." She said, "I'll see what I can do."

In the meantime she was telling me that her sister and her boyfriend, Yanosh Genderhausen, were in hiding. They just cam out from somewhere. And I said, "Why would they have to hide now?" And she said, "Well, they have to hide because of his parents. His parents threatened that they will kill them both. They will never permit him to marry a Jewish girl." I said, "Well, this is already so-called freedom. We were freed by the Russians. Surely the Russians don't make a difference between the Jews and the non-Jews." And she said, "Well, you have a long way to go to understand the psychology of the Jewish elite. They will do anything to become Hungarian elite—anything. They want to make sure that their children keep from going back to being Jews, too."

I looked at Susan, and saw she had aged. She didn't look

anymore as if she was twenty years old; she looked double that. Surely losing a guy like Gary—that was an awful thing. And yet the way he died was another painful thing. And she kept telling me, "You are not Hungarian. You don't understand the mentality of the Hungarian Jews—you really don't. It would take you a long time to really understand. Look, my father is a shoemaker. He could never get into their society because he is much below them. And that's why Gary and I planned to leave, planned to leave completely." I said, "Where would you go?" She said, "Well, we were planning to go to Italy, and then to Palestine." I said, "Well, that's a great idea. What are you planning to do now?" She said, "I'm going. I'm going with my sister and Yanosh. We go together. They are in hiding. As soon as we can get through we will." I said, "How did you get the idea?" She said, "Well, don't you remember Misha—the Russian chauffeur? We got to know him in hiding. He is in hiding with his wife and two children, and he's going to leave as soon as possible, and we're going with them. And I suggest," she told me, "you should come, too." I said, "You're absolutely right. That's my route, too. I'm just going to hang out for a while until I find somebody from my family. I just have to find somebody—maybe my two aunts." She said, "Okay, then we see you there." I said, "Well, where are they hiding?" She said, "This is so critical I really cannot tell you. They just send their regards, and take care of yourself." And that was the last I saw of Susan.

Chapter Thirteen

I WAS WAITING to get back to Czechoslovakia; I could not go to Jasina—there was no way. I'd die on the way, or I could lose my strength and just could not crawl back there. So, walking around the streets of Budapest, it was just awful. It was a lonely, lonely walk, a sad walk. I did find a few people who were freed already, but they were so sick—physically and mentally—that they were too busy just trying to get well, get better. And that's all that counted to them, and again I could not talk to them.

I started to really feel loneliness, because who could understand me? Nobody. I didn't find anybody that I knew in the ghetto, either. So the days were long...and the nights were even longer because I really couldn't sleep. I couldn't even hypnotize myself anymore like I used to during the bombing: "Now you're going to sleep and that's music to your ears"—all this disappeared.

I was thinking a lot about my brother who was in Budapest, and then just went back to Jasina in the hope that Jasina would be freed. Instead he ran straight into the death trap, straight into the fire.

In the beginning of 1945 we still used to hear artillery

shots, and still bombings. And from not too far of a distance. I think Vienna was still under Nazi occupation. But what shall I call Nazi occupation? When I used to see these big heroes, when I used to see them, they really big heroes just when they were killing, murdering, robbing unarmed children, women, some sick men—but when it comes to war, they're really no heroes. My God, did they run! How I saw them in Budapest running. How I saw them beating up each other. How I saw them lost: Where is their heroism? They were so lost without their power against humanity that they ran around insane. Or maybe they got used to killing for so many years and now the were frustrated that they could not. They went insane.

Once when I went to translate in the military camp there were three dead Germans, three dead German who officers were killed by another German. They called him into the office of the Russian general, and I was supposed to ask him why he killed the three Germans. When I did, he leaned forward, he said, "Do you know why? I'll tell you why. Because when I was rushed in an ambulance to a hospital, when I was shot," and he pointed to the spot in his leg where the bullet was still in, "they grabbed the ambulance, and they throw me on the street—an officer from the northern war that I fought against the Russians—they throw me and the chauffeur on the street, and they went to grab Jews. They were so busy deporting the Jews to the death camps that they almost killed me. So when I run into them—in the prison—I just had to cut them down."

"So how did you kill them? Did you have any ammunition?" He said, "I don't need nothing. I just had a leg of a big chair—I broke the chair in the mess hall—and I just killed them just like that."

"Well, how many did you kill in your life?" asked the general. He said "Well, I killed many of your kind. You know I was a solider, and here I had to kill them because they almost killed me."

"Do you feel any guilt or something?" He said, "No. I don't feel guilt about killing. And it doesn't make to me any difference who are killed."

So the general asked me to translate that—I was very slow in translating because my mind didn't register that fast. That once a killer always a killer. And it doesn't matter who he kills—Russian soldiers on the front, Jews or his own Germans. And after a while the general told me, "Look, why are you suddenly closedmouth? Why is your face so red?" I said to him with a shaking voice, "I cannot absorb this—I just cannot. I cannot understand it." That once a killer always a killer. And I explained to him, and he was in his fifties. And he just looked at me and looked at me. And he said to me, "Well, ask him where his family is and how his family is." And I asked him that question, and he said, "Well, I really don't care about my family. I have many women on the front and all. And I don't know where my familis, and I don't really care."

The general told me I should ask him, "Is there anything left that you care about?" He said, "Yes. The only thing I care—wherever there will be a war, I will join the International Soldiers. I shall go to war, that's my only life."

"And where were you trained so good?" asked the general.

"Well, I was trained in the Hitler Youth. And they are the only ones who are right." He told the general, "You really

didn't win the war yet. We will take over the whole of Russia."

And I looked at him, and I looked at him, and he wasn't the first one to talk like that. He was just the first one that I interviewed, and he pointed out to me how he killed his own three Germans who took the ambulance—while he was being taken to the hospital—to deport Jews fast. That's how preoccupied they were with deporting the Jews to the death camps. They didn't even care if they killed their own kind.

So then I asked him one question on my own: "Now when you go back to the detention camp what will you do?" He said, "I'm going to look out for more cowards like these, and believe me, I knock their blocks off. I'm gonna finish them."

Then the general asked him if he could live for a while without killing. He said—well—he's not sure, but even at night he constantly dreams of killing. It's his greatest pleasure. It's like a game.

Then somebody else asked him (the third person who also was a translator. We always were two to check on each other): "How many did you kill, like in the past ten years?" He said, "Oh, I have a diary. I can show you. I have a diary. First I killed Jews in Germany—all of them—all of my neighbors and all; then I killed some of my neighbors I didn't like—even though they weren't Jews; then I was transferred to the Russian front, which was a gem because there were Jews, Polish pigs to kill. I also killed my Ukrainian maid when she didn't want to go to bed with me. It was great. There was no answering for it—I don't have to answer—I don't have to answer to nobody. I had a free hand to do whatever I want to. And I wasn't the only one. All in my battalion

were like that, and we hope to go back to that. Family? I don't need family. Who needs family? If I ever find my wife and daughter I probably will cut them down, too."

And he wasn't the only one. I found that mentality in many German soldiers. They weren't sorry for anything. They were only sorry that somehow the war had ended. And they were gonna search out different wars, and it didn't matter for them. And they were going to keep on killing and killing all the time.

As I walked the streets of Budapest and looked for anyone in my family or for some friends, I saw that the war still went on, except in a different uniform. And I switched from my deep inner song— "they will never get me alive" -–to "where, oh where did my enemies go?" Suddenly the enemies had disappeared. I didn't see the constant newspapers that told Jews would be killed.

As I still walked the streets of Budapest it was hard for me to digest all the things that went on. It was almost even worse than during the shooting, during the deportation of the Jews. Because on the streets of Budapest they went on killing. Now they killed each other. And I didn't know where my enemies had gone. And my song, from "they will never get me alive," turned to "Oh where, oh where did my enemies go?" Surely the same faces were killing the Germans. The same Hungarian, Ukrainian faces were killing the Germans and vice versa, the few that were left. The same faces that I used to see before, now I saw them in the Communist party.

I was so very curious about what they preached in the churches, and because my language was pretty good I went

into many of them. Yes, and they did preach that the Jews were Christ-killers. Nothing had changed.

I used to go to the camp. It was outside of the ghetto, where there was information, and they also used to feed the people who would come back to the ghetto from the concentration camps. To make sure I could spend enough time there, I volunteered to help serve the food. It was through a window that we served the food. And I used to stare at the people so much—to see if I could see somebody from my family. I still didn't believe that I had lost everybody. Many times I spilled the soup, and I was yelled at because of staring. They accused me of staring at the guys—of course I did. I had a couple of brothers.

In the evening I used to go to help out Dr. Rosenock. He didn't want to practice medicine anymore, but a few people who came to him he helped, so I helped him out in his office, and I helped Mrs. Rosenock in the kitchen. They insisted I should please stay with them until I would be able to get back to Prague, Czechoslovakia. I took that offer because they were the only people I really felt close to.

It was Passover 1945 when I for the last time saw the Rosenocks. Their daughter, their son-in-law, and their granddaughter, Ann, came too. And it was just like a family Seder, and Dr. Rosenock really made it in the details. And everybody cried, everybody held hands and cried. Of course I understand why they cried. They especially hugged me—for something. Maybe they felt they would be cured or healed or relieved of their miseries if they held me. And they kept saying to me, "Only you can understand this. Only a child like you who went through so much can understand this." Of

course I cried too—we all cried. The Seder was...tears and very little wine.

And as we talked, Dr. Rosenock's son-in-law asked me if I could go—that probably one of his neighbors took everything out of his apartment—and if I could get Russian authority or papers or an officer to go and see if he could recover something. I said to him that I no longer worked for the Kommandantura, but I could get somebody. Anybody would be glad to do it—if you pay him something. He said he'd be glad to, but we needed some kind of authority because those people were still in the Parliament, and they took all the valuables. They just came in and took everything. And I promised I would do it.

Then the question came up about Gary, their son, how he suffered and how he died. And that was a painful, painful evening—very painful.

They also let me talk. And I didn't really have much to say—I only had a million questions. A million questions. "How come the Christians still preach hate?" And Dr. Rosenock asked me, where did I hear it? "Well, of course I heard it from the nuns in the hospital—but that was during the war. But I do usually go in almost every Sunday morning to different churches, since I understand Hungarian now. And I listen."

That made Dr. Rosenock a little bit mad, and he said, "Hey kid, did you ever go into a synagogue?" I said, "I really did. Just yesterday, the first day of Passover I did. And I almost passed out because the prayers, the tallis—all reminded me of my parents. I just remember that somebody gave me a glass of water. I don't know if I yelled or screamed.

Somebody patted my back, and they gave me a glass of water, and they walked out with me." And Mrs. Rosenock said, "Yeah, I saw you walking with a handsome young man. Is that anything serious?" I said, "No, he just walked me from the synagogue, and he asked me if he can see me again. But I told him I'm leaving. I'm going back to Czechoslovakia."

And I also asked them the question about how right after a bloody war, people filled in all the Jewish apartments, people filled in all the Jewish houses. It was like there were never Jews in Hungary. And one man even told me when I went to look for my friend, Rose, and I knocked on the door, he said to me, "There never—Jews never lived here. This is German, we took it from the Germans." So I don't know happened to them—it looked like the Nazis took them all, even the non-Jewish woman who used to live with Rose's boss, the dentist.

So it was already erased and denied that these houses, these apartments, ever belonged to the Jews. The Germans grabbed it, killed the Jews—then the good Hungarians came and took it from the Germans: "It wasn't Jewish—it was German." So the Jew already was erased, already disappeared, already nobody wanted to know about him.

And when I told this man, "You're wrong. You're living in a Jewish house. I know there were Jewish people—you better tell me where they are—" he slammed the door in my face.

So I had this question. I also had another question for the Rosenocks: Why do the Fascists and the Communists fight among themselves? They kill each other in the camps and the streets, just to get the possessions—what they steal from the

Jews. I never saw the Jews kill each other in the ghetto when they were hungry. I have never seen them fight over the piece of bread. What is it? Is it anything wrong with us?"

And Dr. Rosenock interrupted, and he said, "Well, my child, you will understand later." "No," I said. "What later? Now! What is it with me? Is something wrong with me, too, that I don't just go out with a knife and just cut everybody until he's completely cut up? Thirty-five people that they killed in my family. Why was I raised with so much restraint? Constant restraint...."

He said to me, "My child, you will find out that this restraint, this self-discipline, made us Jewish people survive."

Of course his daughter was sitting silent, and his son-in-law. His little granddaughter was sitting next to me, and we held each other. And she almost considered me like a big sister. And she begged me to take her with me to Czechoslovakia. And I said to her, using her nickname, "Onishka, I can't. You have to give them strength to pull through this." And that time again—they cried, and cried, and asked, "Where do you get so much wisdom?" I said, "I don't have so much wisdom. I'm just full of pain, and I almost hate myself for not being able to get a knife or a gun and just cut...cut anybody. Who the hell cares—guilty, not guilty? My parents weren't guilty."

So, we were sitting until two A.M. talking. That was the last time I saw the Rosenocks. Of course that night Mrs. Rosenock came to my bed, and she held my hands. She woke me up. I screamed, she said that I screamed so much she heard me. And she was sitting on my bed, and it was like five

A.M., and she stayed in my room and we talked—talked endlessly. And she told me that if I go around with so much hate that I will start hating myself. And she was sure that my parents didn't raise me with hate. And I should be restrained and start just working for the Jewish people.

"Yeah," I told her, "being a goody-goody. How long, and for what? I wish I could kill—like they did. I just wish..."

And I remained with the wish. And she kissed me.

Right after Passover I left. I went to Vienna, maybe there was a camp there. And they said there were some people there who had the same name as my cousins. So I went to look there, and when I didn't find them I just went back. Prague was just about free, and I went back. And so I left the bloody streets of Budapest, which I knew so well—with so many bodies, with the ghetto, with the bloody Danube, with the ripping—apart of Jewish children...

I was a tiny bit relieved to be in Prague. I walked the streets. There were a few people that survived. They walked around. There was also a kitchen—there they fed us. Of course I felt guilty then. I wasn't exactly in Auschwitz—to be fed for free! So next thing I found myself volunteering there, for two reasons. First, because I had to eat. Second, maybe, maybe, I will spot somebody. I knew when I went back to school that I wouldn't have time to look around.

So all I found was my cousin, whose name was Buboritchana, too. And he was luckier than I was. His brother lived through it in Russia—two of them. And we talked at length, and he just didn't seem to have that pain. He just was too glad to have lived through it. I wasn't sure, I didn't tell anybody that I was not too thrilled that I lived through it.

Even if my song had twisted to: "Oh where, oh where, did my enemies go?" That's what I was singing constantly.

In 1945, in Prague, there was definitely a different atmosphere. There was definitely a more relaxed outlook—on the surface. And as I walked the streets of Prague, I did feel a little bit more at ease. Maybe I didn't know which stone was carrying the Jewish blood, or maybe because the people were friendly and were glad to see us.

As I walked on the street I met my friend from Budapest. Her name was Ethel. And we started talking, and she reminded me of the time in 1944 when we were dressed up in Hitler Youth uniforms, and we went to collect money for the Hitler Youth. Because we could not have told the people—even the Jewish people—the truth, that we collected to send Jewish children to Israel. There was a rumor that we might be able to do it for money—send some Jewish children either through Bulgaria or Romania to Israel, which they called Palestine at that time.

And we were talking how we had a good time being in the Hitler Youth uniforms and walking around cheerfully, and the Nazis with their bayonets waving at us. But deep down, deep down was the sadness that just by putting on the uniform we became a special class. And we saw the Jewish people in Budapest all with the stars—wearing the Star of David to do their shopping. Well, shopping—to go out a little bit from the ghetto and get a bread ration.

And remembering how it felt to be the super race in the Hitler Youth uniforms, suddenly my heart started beating faster. And my friend recognized that I didn't feel too good, and she stopped talking. So we started walking and walking

until we came to a Jewish synagogue, and it was the oldest synagogue in Prague. She said, "Let's go in here." And I said, "I can't. I can't. I tried it before and I always see my father, my brother, my mother. And I just feel that would be the end of me. On the surface I'm pretty normal, but under the skin there is just the memory..."

And maybe it was the stupidity of me that I didn't kill, that I didn't even attempt to kill the Germans or anybody around me. Many times I used to be mad at myself, wondering why can't I just pick up a knife and just cut. Maybe that would make me feel better. Then I remembered Dr. Rosenock's words, I remembered my parents' words that self-discipline—yes, "self-discipline" my parents would tell me five times a day—is the main builder of life. Self-discipline! What is self-discipline when you're filled with bad memories, and you cannot go around and just kill left and right, just like they killed your family? But it's self-discipline that you have to sit over your books all day long.

Well, I spoke to myself because my friend didn't let me talk like that. She was much older, and maybe she just understood life better, or maybe she just wanted to make me feel good.

Anyway, we walked on past the synagogue, and suddenly we started to talk about Raoul Wallenberg. We went into the place where they used to give us our meals—the rations. And that day I had off, although every day I would help them just to get my meal and to see who came there—maybe I would find somebody. Again, hope against hope, but that hope was instilled in me by my parents. You have to hope, you have to believe, you have to keep clean, you cannot hurt anybody. Hah! "You cannot hurt anybody!" Sometimes I felt

like digging in Nazi eyes. I felt, but would I really do it? I was ashamed to think that I didn't have the bloody guts to kill. I really didn't have the bloody guts to kill. Yet I felt so much like doing it.

So we were sitting in that place; it was sort of like a basement cafeteria, but to us it was beautiful. The potato soup was delicious, and the dumplings were...everything good to us. I mean, to sit in freedom and not to be afraid, and to eat a hot meal, to be clean. Oh golly, what a privilege, what a privilege.

Of course, being the age that we were we were constantly approached by young men. And my friend was ten years older, and she really wanted to get married. She knew what she wanted to do. So she proceeded to become serious about a young man. But I could not live in the present. I had to live last year, and the year before, and the whole five years from 1940 to 1945.

But we did manage to remember Budapest and of course Raoul Wallenberg. I said, "Oh my God, yes—Raoul Wallenberg." But when we had gone to the Swedish Embassy in Badapest, we were almost thrown out. I said, "Well, let's go in here, in Prague, to the embassy, to the Swedish—we might get a different reception. We might even be able to find an address for him and be able to send him a thank-you note. My God, how can we not send a thank-you note, or kiss somebody's feet for doing what this young man did?!"

So we went into the Swedish Embassy. We were greeted like some kind of heroes. I looked around me—who do they greet like that, with such love? I wondered if somebody, some big war hero, was behind me and they wanted to congratulate him.

But we were greeted as heroes and offered hot tea and cookies. And the atmosphere was really warm, and they listened to us and they said, "Why don't you sit down. We're going to call Budapest, and we gonna get you the information. You should write to him and be very grateful, which you are."

And it took a long time, maybe an hour, but we were sitting there talking and drinking tea. And the same man who went in and promised to call Budapest didn't come out. Another one came out. And the other one said, "Believe me, Mr. Raoul Wallenberg is A-okay, he just doesn't want to be bothered. And besides, he has a mother and family in Stockholm, and they sure will take good care of him. And when the time comes I'm sure he will give you an address, and through the newspapers you will be able to write your thankfulness and all that."

And we left, and I said again what I had said before: "Well, sure, he saved a couple of stinking Jews, but he doesn't want to be bothered with thank-yous and ceremonies. He wasn't that kind of person." But my friend said to me, "You remember in Budapest? I have a feeling, I have a feeling that somebody in the Swedish Embassy in Budapest wanted Mr. Wallenberg dead. There is no way that this gentleman wouldn't want to talk to us or see us. He was such an earthy human being. He was an exceptional human being."

And I said, "I'm not sure. Maybe he did want to save us, but he doesn't want to have anything to do with us now."

So we left the embassy. And we starting talking about other things.

In the cafeteria many times people came from the Czechoslovakian offices, and they offered us apartments.

And I said, "I have to go back to Jasina, because that's where I want to finish high school, and I don't think I'll stay in Prague or anywhere else. I'll finish high school, and then I will probably leave for Israel."

One thing hit me like a stone on my head. When we went to see these apartments—which were very beautiful apartments—many people had taken them and settled in. And the apartments always advertised that they were German apartments." But one man admitted, "Well, not exactly. We didn't have too many in Prague. We had a lot in the Sudetenland, or near the Austrian border. But you see, these were really Jewish apartments, Jewish houses, and then the Germans took them over—so we call them German."

And that hit me like a stone on my head. History was already being denied right here—right here! You take out a couple of Jews from their homes that their families have had for hundreds of years; you kill them, you occupy them, and then it becomes German property—of course! There—history was already being denied right then and there. And in my good Czechoslovakia!

Well, I didn't have the strength or the wisdom to go and protest that in the office. I just used to talk to myself or talk to my friends about it.

Once we took the train to the Sudeten Mountains. And it was pretty cheap, and it was a beautiful ride. And we went to the Sudetenland because it was suggested to us we should go, we should see the concentrations camps where they rounded up the Nazis. They didn't round up all Germans; they rounded up the Nazis—those that were active in killing,

and those that were active in robbing the Czech people. Not only the Jews, but the Czech people too.

And there were the big, huge concentration camps. There were the so-called war heroes. I don't think the Germans even had such things as war heroes, except that they would get the medals for killing or bringing in gold teeth, or human hair, or even human skin to make their lamp shades. That was their heroism. There is no such thing as a German hero. As long as you feed them well and all...otherwise they are no fighters. I have seen them.

So there they walked around in this camp. It was a pretty decent camp. It wasn't a camp to send them to their death, they were just being sent back to Germany. Czechoslovakia didn't want them anymore. But they walked around in their uniforms with their medals. And this really made me laugh. Where are those heroes? There they are, and they still have somewhere to go back home. Where did the Jewish people have to go back? All the doors were closed for the Jews. The Germans still can go back to their Germany. They still can go back to their land where they talk the language. Somebody still speaks up for them. Nobody ever spoke up for the Jew—nobody. The whole world shut their ears. They just didn't want to talk about it, they didn't want to rock the boat. Not even the Jews wanted to rock the boat. American Jews were happy with the way things wee, because in the United States prosperity came to them. And so what if European Jews are suffering? Let's close our eyes, and we cannot go against President Roosevelt...Do nothing!

So there I saw that my brother—who told me in Budapest

that the doors were closed for us and there was nothing that we can do—was right. This always depressed me. I don't like the word depression. I prefer to hope against hope—even if you have no help.

So after seeing the camp—I cannot call it a concentration camp—where they give you food, you have water. It probably was some kind of a military camp, and the Czech people felt fine about that. It made me feel worse. Because of what I saw there, that there are these murderers who have a place to go to, who are treated like human beings—which they're not; for whom the world speaks up, for whom the world opens the door. Because the biggest crooks and murderers, they had their money ready, because they robbed Jewish money; they had their passports ready to Argentina, to Paraguay, to Uruguay, to Chile. Of course the Ukrainian murderers came to the United States, and are very safe there because people speak up for them. They were helped to come there. And who knows, who knows if they're not kept in some way to do the same thing somewhere else. Nobody is safe. There is no such thing as "him," or "them." It's "us." It's us. I have seen that in Budapest, when the poor Jewish people ran to convert—to be converted to save their skins, they were stampeded to death. And those that were half—alive were thrown into a truck and were dragged away straight to the crematoriums. So there is no such thing as "them;" there is all of us. There is all of us. Nobody was spared. Nobody is spared, because like an epidemic it catches on too fast.

Epilogue

IT DIDN'T TAKE TOO LONG before the tragedy of the Poland concentration camps became very visible. Why, of all Europe, were the most concentration camps built in Poland? Auschwitz in Poland, Maidanek, Treblinka. Well, I didn't have to ask somebody wise because I know the Polish mentality. They were the best helping hands of the Nazis, and the Nazis used them. And to reward them, the Nazis killed them, too. Sometimes there were fights over a golden tooth from a Jew, sometimes over a ring or a couple of dollars. Yes, dollars. The Nazis had plenty of dollars. They rewarded the Poles—they killed them then. What blinded the Poles were the Jews. The Nazis said, "Go get the Jew and you'll be rewarded." Sure they were rewarded.

In no time in 1945 trains started to come through Czechoslovakia. And as I was by then a volunteer for the Red Cross, we used to run out in the middle of the night to give the refugees hot tea, and some clothing for the children. My God—children. I couldn't believe it—a Jewish child still alive. Yes, there were some children whose parents were in Russia, and when they came back to Poland, the Polacks didn't hesitate to cut them—I mean cut them with knives, or shoot them. They

didn't wait. Yes, Poland was the only country after the war, I mean after the war in 1945, where they killed Jews. They didn't want to let them suffer. It wasn't like they handed down so-called German apartments and houses to the survivors. The Poles just did not let them live, or at least live in Poland—and that was why trains passed through Czechoslovakia for Austria or Germany. From there, the Jews would go further, which they didn't know yet. Most of them really wanted to go to the Jewish land, to Palestine—Israel. Most of them.

Of course there was England: the English who closed their doors, who closed their eyes, just to kill more Jews—so they wouldn't ask to come back to their promised land, to their homeland—which it is. There is can be no denying that history.

So I talked to many of the Polish Jews. Most of those survivors had lived through the war in Russia. They had their stories to tell, but they weren't horrible stories like the stories from the concentration camps, or from the bloody streets of Poland, the bloody streets of Budapest. And poor squeezed Jasina, where I was born. Squeezed because after the war, they squeezed the throats and choked the lives out of the few Jews that were left very fast.

Yes, one young man told me that he walked with his brother. They were in the Russian army from Poland. I mean they ran from Poland to Russia. He walked with his brother on the street in the uniforms. They were the ones who formed the Polish army. Imagine! The Jews formed a Polish army and the Polacks claimed credit for that. And his brother—after going through the war in the army—was cut up by a Polish punk. He wasn't the only one. That was just the one that was told to me.

So Poland did not let the Jews live. After the war they

killed them. Or after the war they made them leave, those that were able to run and leave. So how many times did the Polish Jew run for his life? First the Germans took over Poland. Then the Jews were either lucky to run away to Russia, or they died in the concentration camps. And now—after the war, after fighting and making a name for the Polish army, Jews were being killed right now.

Well, the only solution is a Jewish country. There is no other way. Nobody will ever stand up for us. It's just Israel that will stand up for us. Without Israel we are nothing. And we need each other, and we shall be fighting for that country forever—forever. Nobody will ever tell us what to do. Nobody will tell us that we're not going to bomb Auschwitz or the concentration camps. Nobody will tell us that these are German houses when they really were Jewish. We will not let history be twisted. We will not permit it. And if it comes to fighting with blood we shall do it, and keep Israel very strong. Very strong, because of what I have seen through the war: There is no protection; there is nobody who will stand up for us, except that we will stand up for each other. I will never forget that some Jews in Budapest thought they were better because they were heroes from the First World War; or that some Jews in the United States think they're better because they are not Zionists. One thing I would love to tell the Jews: Zionist, not Zionist; Communist, not Communist—whatever. He is at first a Jew—first, second, and third, and last, because he will always be under the threat of death. History has proven that there is no other way. And because of that it should make us stronger. Because of that we should stick together.

Told with heartbreaking intensity, *The Lonesome Run* is the story of one young girl who survived against all odds. Like a tale from another world, filled with ghosts and voices from the past, her story of bravery will remind readers of the importance of holding on to "hope against hope" when there is nothing else left to hold onto.

Growing up in Jasina, Czechoslovakia when World War II breaks out, Annie Bern is accused of being a spy. She flees her home and winds up in Budapest, where she hides out with a kindly doctor and his family. Back home, her own family is rounded up and brought to the concentration camps. For her, however, one thought always remains uppermost in her mind: "They will never take me alive." In order to stay one step ahead of the Nazis, she alternately assumes positions as a housekeeper, a nurse's aide, and a nun's assistant. She also finds herself sleeping in bombed-out houses as the war ends and is eventually helped, as many others were, by Raoul Wallenberg.

About the Author

Annie Bern was born in Jasina, Czechoslovalia, in 1924. Her hometown became occupied by the Hungarian army in 1939, and her family lost their land and everything else they owned of substance. During the course of World War II, Ms. Bern lost a total of thirty-five members of her family.

Ms. Bern, retired and a widow, has three children: Rochelle, Joseph, and Leonard. She resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. *The Lonesome Run* is Ms. Bern's first book.

Memoirs / $15.95
Cover design by Carlene Liscinsky
Rutledge Books, Inc.
Danbury, CT 06811
www.rutledgebooks.com

ISBN 1-58244-006-9
9 781582 440064 01595